

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **GOOD TO GLOW!**

PCZONE

ISSUE 179 APRIL 2007

EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

STALKER SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

It's here! Our unmissable verdict on the controversial radioactive shooter!

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

Exclusive! The horror legend speaks out on his return to PC gaming

REVIEWS SPECIAL

Supreme Commander, Jade Empire, WOW: Burning Crusade and more!

WIN!

TINY COMPO
The purchase is 'Chernobyl Fallout', but what's the joke?

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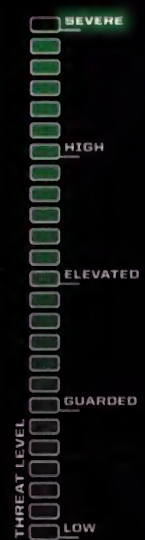
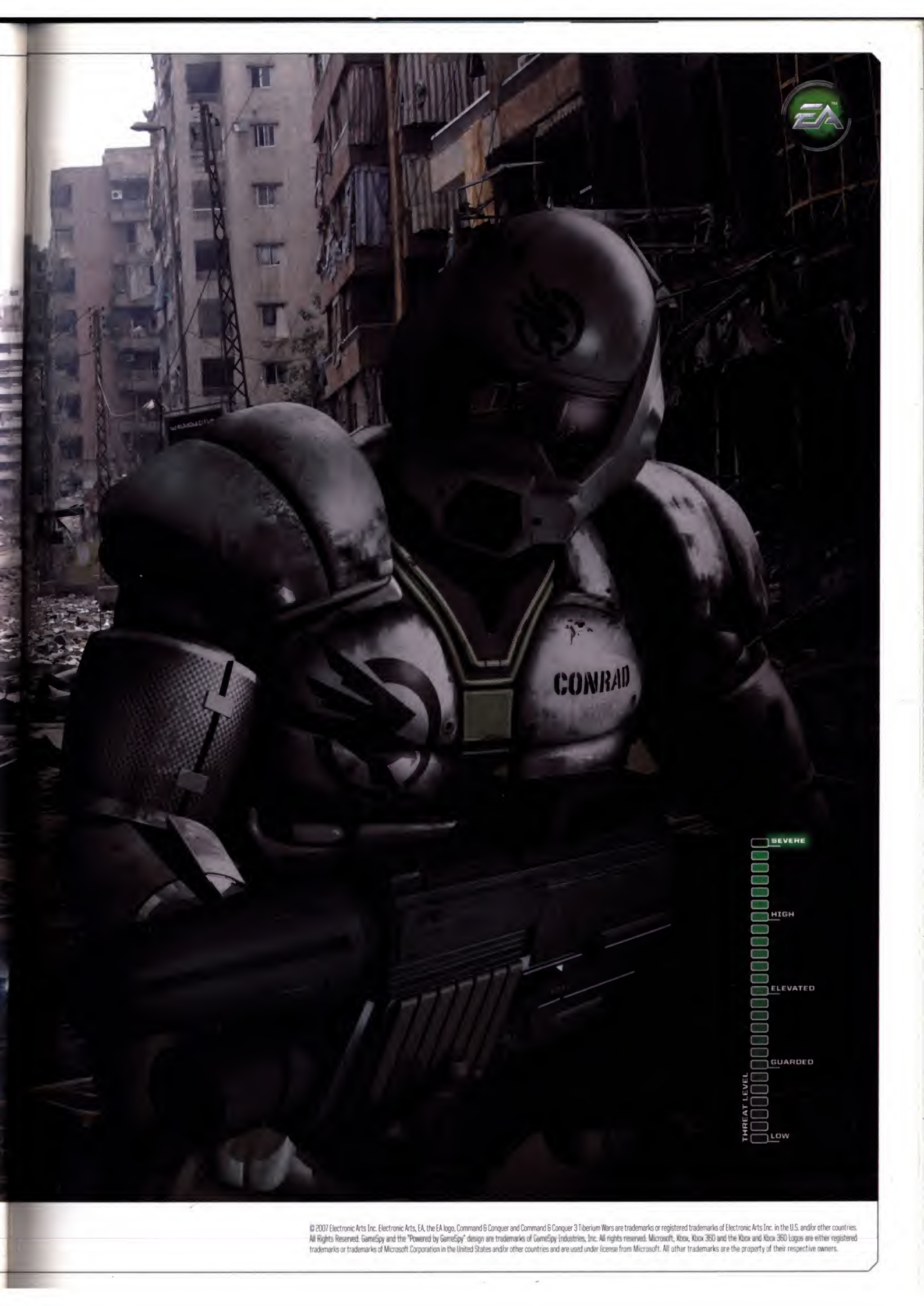
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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE

COVER STORY

56

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

Will the long-delayed radioactive shooter get a glowing report?

NEVERQUEST 123

"Racked with despair, I mercilessly kill a toad"



FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
THRILLING NEW SHOOTER FROM
THE MAKERS OF DESERT COMBAT! 20

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



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Too busy? PC ZONE in 59 words...
Reviews galore with scores in nosebleed territory, giving you more than enough gaming hours to sink your manky fangs into. Will dons a wig again, Pavel immerses himself in the filthy world of FanFic and we take in the view from Vista. Plus, there's a free spooky book that'll make you go "Oh Clive, is there really any need..."



STALKER'S ALIVE!

NOPE, WE CAN hardly believe it either – *STALKER* is finally here! And it's good! It was issue 109, December 2001, when *PC ZONE* first featured *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, although back then, the game was known as *Oblivion Lost* and had a release date of 2003. Six years, the worst E3 demonstration we've ever attended and three name-changes later, *PC ZONE* is the first magazine in the world to review the ambitious, Ukrainian-developed shooter that promised freeform levels, emergent AI and role-playing elements.

While not quite delivering a violent *Deus Ex* for the 21st century, *STALKER* still manages to create a thrilling, scary and forbidding irradiated world that nicely fills a gap while we wait for *BioShock* and *Crysis*. You can read Will Porter's lengthy verdict beginning on page 56.

In a stellar issue for reviews, we also bring you Blizzard's world-conquering MMO *World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade*, Chris 'Total Annihilation' Taylor's *Supreme Commander*, BioWare's latest RPG *Jade Empire* and the very Gallic *TrackMania United*.

Also this issue, we track down horror legend Clive Barker for an exclusive interview, info on his nasty new game *Jericho* and even give you a free book with stories from his infamous *Books Of Blood* series, which – be warned – contains swearing, extreme violence and a psychotic pig. There's no other games mag that can promise you that...

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton, editor

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BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

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We leaf nervously through the self-proclaimed 'Argos catalogue of sick', and interview the man who invented it

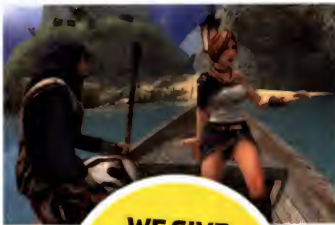
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WE GIVE OUR VIEWS ON THE SHINY NEW OS FROM MICROSOFT

FREEPLAY/FREWARE

Freeware

Steve Hogarty takes a free trip through gaming history

COUNTERCLOCKWISE

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STAR WARS

May the Force be with you

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THRUST XTREME

Click and drag and twist and thrust

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

FREE GAMES!

110 **FREWARE**
They give their games away? What are they, some kind of suckers? Let's pay these chumps a little visit...

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CRACKDOWN



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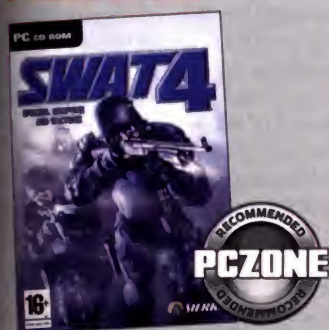
UPFRONT

MEET THE TEAM

Every issue brings all of us one step closer to death

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**MARTIN KORDA**

Centurial freelancer

AGE: He is timeless as the hills

LIKES: Round numbers

DISLIKES: Quorn

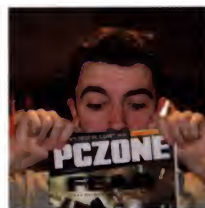
FANCIES: His lovely wife

FAVE GAME: *Rome: Total War*

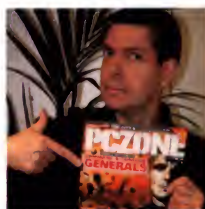
PLAYING NOW:

*Supreme Commander*The notoriously affable Martin Korda has been with us for a
staggering 100 issues now. If all of those issues were laid end to
end it would make a line of magazines 30 metres long. That's
0.000008% of the way to the Moon, ladies and gentlemen, as well
as 0.3% of the total height of Mount Everest. If he does this 665 and
two thirds more times, he could fashion a pair of PC ZONE stilts,
capable of walking over Mount Everest. We calculated that this will
take him until June in the year 7127. Congratulations Martin!**SUZY WALLACE**

Reviews editor

Suzy has 44 issues under her belt,
which happens to be the dialling code
for England, where Suzy lives. This
coincidence is so hugely improbably
that we now believe Suzy to be a witch.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Jade Empire**STEVE HOGARTY**

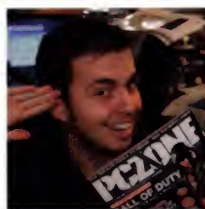
Staff writer

Steve was the first post-redesign writer,
having been at PC ZONE for precisely
20 issues. When he arrived he had a
stupid Irish accent, but now he speaks
like normal stupid people.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
BF 2142: Northern Strike**JAMIE SEFTON**

Editor

Jamie's been a thorn in PCZ's side for 59
issues, starting as a man employed to
stand in the way of direct sunlight and
draughts. Having done such a good job,
he was promptly promoted to editor.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Unreal Tournament III**JON 'LOG' BLYTH**

Staff writer

Log is the ZONE newbie, with but 13
issues to his name. Unlucky for some -
especially Log, who despises his job and
everyone around him, and spends eight
hours a day growling into a paper cup.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Lord Of The Rings Online Beta**WILL PORTER**

Deputy editor

Will didn't realise this month that he's
been writing for PCZ for 50 whole
issues. Unfortunately his milestone issue
has coincided with Martin's own
achievements, meaning nobody cares.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl**CLARE LYDON**

Managing editor

Our managing editor Clare's been
around for 43 issues, just one less than
Suzy. Funnily enough, 43 is the number
of different combinations you can make
with seven equilateral triangles.WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
*Boxercise*STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... "What's special about this number?" - an ace website listing 'interesting' facts about numbers
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Transcribing a half-hour interview with a softly-spoken Frenchman on a long-distance
phone-line with the headset constantly banging against the ear mic

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

CATHOLICS VS GAYS 33 Mins The Gays win this round - but what have those crafty Catholics got up their sleeves?

POSH SCHOOL HOUSES 24 Mins Will's school had 'Paulo Pontine', 'Farrars' and 'St Cuthberts'. Log's had 'East' and 'West'

HEALTHY CAKES 2 Mins One, they're tiny. Two, they taste like buggar-all. You're kidding no-one, Mr Kipling

EVERYONE'S LOSING AT FOOTBALL 42 Mins Spurs, Leeds, QPR - is it really worth it? Probably not. Plus they're overpaid, etc

SKELETON HORSE 51 Mins How Log EARNED his WOW mount, and didn't rely on handouts from Blizzard

SUPER FAT CAT 143 Mins When idiot owners force-feed their pets

VEGAS PLAYING CARDS 12 Mins A souvenir from a press trip. They've got black bits on the corner. Vegas black bits

FEAR OF PAINTBALLING 6 Mins It all goes back to Ant from Ant and Dec getting shot in the eye

LOVE, ACTUALLY 9 Mins We still think it's shit, but Kevin our dep art guy cries every time

VOICE RECORDERS 17 Mins The journalist's friend. Also good for recording screaming nutters on the bus

WIN!

Tiny Compo! Come out of your mousehole, climb into my palm, and whisper the
winner of Tiny Compo 177 into my ear. I could crush you, Tiny Compo - but I love you
far too much to even think of that, even though I just did. What's that? You say it's
Ricky Wilson, from London's Vauxhall? Well done Ricky, have an unspecified something. Send this
month's entries to "Tiny Compo 179 May Be Small, But Her Heart Is Full Of Love", PC ZONE, Future
Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW. Don't forget your contact details.GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before
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or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Hackney!

LETTERS

Jamie Sefton always wanted to be a man of letters...



DON'T PITY THE BULLY

I'm a long-time reader of *PC ZONE*, and have always, without fail, loved reading each publication, and have even had the honour of meeting a few of the crew. I just wanted to convey my appreciation for the 'Bully For You' report in issue 178. Having been a victim of bullying throughout my entire school life, and still haunted by such memories, I appreciate even more the emphasis on the effects of bullying, and wholeheartedly agree that online bullying, whether it is an action in-game or over VoIP, can have as much of an effect as physical bullying. The only thing I don't agree with is 'pitying' bullies – they deserve no such attention. Chris 'King-Kodiak' Buxton



Thanks Chris. We love kick-starting debates and raising issues in the mag, and online bullying is one of the most popular topics we've featured recently. Do continue to let us know about any ungentlemanly behaviour in PC gaming and we'll let Pavel Barter loose on them...

HELLO? HELLO?

I've emailed a few letters to *PC ZONE* over the last year or two, but none of them have made it in. I noticed recently you weren't receiving emails (mine were getting bounced back), so I wondered if my first letter to get published could be about the fact you've been having trouble receiving letters. I'm not sure if it would be properly ironic, like a thousand spoons on your wedding day, but it would definitely satisfy my sense of drama, and probably stop me writing to you. It's your choice, basically. Print this letter, or delete an email every three months. Neil Winn

OK, you win Neil. Apologies again to anyone who had an email bounced back from us over Christmas due to SOME IDIOT CANCELLING OUR EMAIL ACCOUNT.

STARFORCE

First things first – I have been reading your magazine for some time now and think it is the best PC games magazine! Anyway, down to business. I've found out that there's copy protection software called StarForce that is installed on your machine without your knowledge and can't be scanned

by malware or spyware tools. However, there's a community of people who want the StarForce copy protection system banned from use. If you want to learn more about it, check out this weblink: www.glop.org/starforce. Stuart

This has been an issue rumbling on for several years now. We're all in favour of games companies protecting their titles from getting pirated, but we're with you on this one Stuart – StarForce is a pain in the arse, and can allegedly cause compatibility issues with your PC. The good news is that Ubisoft haven't used it since the launch of *Heroes Of Might And Magic V*, and there are patches available to remove it from other companies' titles such as *X3: Reunion*.

SCARY MONSTERS

Last issue's Supertest about the scariest gaming moments reminded me of my own most nightmarish in-game experience. It was in *Half-Life 2* – the horrific experience of stalking through the abandoned beach house on the coastal road bit. Playing the level for, oh, the 96th time, I thought I was ready for whatever could be lurking



Letter of the month

Vista my arse

Now that everybody's raving about Windows Vista, I feel I must point out that the best version of Windows has always been, and shall remain, Windows 95. For example, on the installation CD there were a handful of movies designed to show off Windows Media Player (which, back then, wasn't a cumbersome piece of glossy rubbish), and one of them was Weezer's *Buddy Holly*. That easter egg propelled the band to their current status as the nerdiest rock band the world has ever seen. Not only did Windows 95 do this, but it also had the infamous 'It is now safe to turn off your computer' screen, which made everybody feel really secure about when they could push the power button on their PC. These days, I simply can't tell. ThinBob

Nice stuff, ThinBob. You can read our views on Microsoft's new OS on page 24, and Phil Wand's Vista tips and guide beginning on page 93. Enjoy the graphics card, although it may struggle to run *Supreme Commander* in Windows 95...

WIN!



ONE OF THESE!

Can you feel the love tonight? Here at *PC ZONE* we're awash with it, which is why if you write us a letter and we deem it to be the best of the month, we'll reward you with PNY's limited-edition 7600GT PCI-E *Splinter Cell* bundle, retailing for £99.99. For more info on PNY Technologies, please refer to www.PNY-Europe.com

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SAY WHAT?

A few choice highlights from the PCZ forum...

"With *SiN* going tits-up and Valve taking their usual age over *Episode Two*, it seems that the idea of episodic gaming has stalled somewhat. At least there's Telltale to do things properly."

Beats12

"*S&M: Situation Comedy* was good, but I hope they ramp up the difficulty of the puzzles a bit with later episodes... I don't mind short snippets of gaming and the writing is great, but if there is no real challenge it ends up feeling like an interactive comic rather than a game."

Dogen_D_Derrible

"Crying shame, it really is. I played a bit of *SiN 1* before going into the first episode and was really getting into all those characters and the whole storyline around it."

ckinnerly
"Best digital boobs I've seen in a game - the physics were great. I'm gonna miss them."

funkyjack

Join in the forum jollity at www.pczone.co.uk

"You don't cover *MS Flight Sim* add-ons such as *Airbus A340*. Are they not important enough?"

Dave Follows wants his peculiar gaming niche covered in *PC ZONE*

inside. Cautiously, I stalked around the living room and kitchen before making my way upstairs, and for a split second I caught a glimpse of a dark figure lurching into a room at the far end of the hallway. I readied my shotgun and smirked as I turned the corner and blew a cabinet to pieces. Puzzled, I searched the rest of the upstairs rooms but found nothing, and decided my mind was playing tricks on me. After blasting an innocent seabird, I turned around to go downstairs and was greeted by the bloated, grotesque form of a poison headcrab zombie a few inches from my face. My sister, who was sitting next to me at the time, still can't hear properly in her left ear.

Robert Martin

There should be more terrifying moments on PC this year Robert, with the release of *BioShock*, *Alan Wake* and *Crysis*. Although I'm actually getting scared right now thinking about Gearbox and Sega's new *Alien FPS*...

MILE-HIGH CLUB

PC gaming is different from console gaming because of the true diversity

of titles out there for us to buy. You have the usual shooters, strategy and action-adventures, but there's also MMOGs, retro games, episodic adventures (such as the excellent *Sam & Max*) and space sims (*EVE Online*). For my sins, I'm a huge fan of flight sims (Microsoft's latest is a work of genius), but you don't seem to cover the vast array of different *MS Flight Sim* add-ons you can buy from companies including Just Flight such as *Airbus A340*. Are they not important enough titles for *PC ZONE*?

Dave Follows



We get bombarded by dozens of these packs every month and frankly, expansions such as *Airbus A340* are just too damn boring to contemplate giving space in the mag. However, that's not to say we don't like flight sims - we loved Microsoft's *Flight Sim X* (issue 175, 89%), and last month we had a feature on Oleg Maddox's latest title *Storm Of War: Battle Of Britain*. However, if anyone else thinks we should be covering more air/road/rail sims, tear yourself away from your joystick and let us know.

COME ON WILL!

So there I was reading issue 177 when I got to page 36. WTF! Argue The Toss! Arse-kissin' love-in, more like! Where's the venom, the malice, the utterly ridiculous arguments from Porter? Now don't get me wrong, I can see why he may be afraid of Suzy (compare the photos - I think we know who'd win that one), but have some respect man and get stuck in. You've let yourself down, you've let your family down... You know the rest. Ally Bryce

Over to Will... "I'd like it to go on record that I've been unafraid of girls

PINK FREUD

After our metallic Dr Jung wiped his memory banks in a tryst with a babe magnet, we fashioned Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) from flesh, fabric and pins. With his research team of 700 toy poodles, Pink Freud exists only to answer your questions...



Send your gaming questions and queries to letters@pczone.co.uk

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q What are plucky indie developers Introversion up to these days?
Darren McCabe

A A quick scouring of said developer's blog reveals they are currently toiling on their next title, tentatively titled *Subversion*. Despite writing thousands of words on the subject, they refuse to reveal a great deal about their new game. What is known, however, is that the game will feature a form technical chicanery known as 'procedural generation', or content generated using an algorithm. They have released two videos showing cities and office blocks being created on-the-fly, but to suggest that such things are indicative of the final game would be pure speculation.

DEAR DR FREUD,

Q You are so pretty and soft and pink, and I would like to know how Peter Molyneux's spending his days.
Aaron Burns

A Putting your obvious fascination with the male genitalia aside, Lionhead Studios (who are now owned by the Microsoft corporation I'm sure you'll recall) are working on *Fable 2* for the Xbox 360 machine. Their eternally unannounced *Project Dimitri* is still turning the rumour mill too, although it's been confirmed that it and *Fable 2* are not one and the same. *Fable 2* meanwhile has not been announced for the PC, but I could guess with relative certainty that Microsoft will place it on its Games For Windows range within a year of its console release.

LETTERS



@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ letters, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe street, london, nw1 6nw

PCZONE Around the World



We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

for a good five years now, and show few signs of remission. I remain, however, scared of four women: my mother, Suzy, managing editor Clare and my girlfriend. All the random ones you see on the street though, I'm fine with them. Unless they talk to me, or look at me funny. Which they sometimes do."

PES PROBLEM

Nice review of *Pro Evolution Soccer 6* – 88% does seem about right. But why do you keep bemoaning the fact that we didn't get the new features of the Xbox 360 version?

Have you played it? The 360 version has no player-edit features (beyond cosmetic changes), no team edits, no training challenges, fewer animations, a controller that simply doesn't work very well with the game and, the absolute nail in the coffin: no saving of replays. The PC version may not have the flash graphics, but what we do have is a game that isn't horribly broken in many ways. Unfortunately on this occasion, PC ZONE is wrong. We PC fans have got the best version. Again. Ambs

I love PES, but my problem with it is the often-stupid AI of your team mates. Producer Shingo Takatsuka has said himself that the 360 version has better AI and animation, which, for me, are more important than replays, editing and so on. Yes, the D-pad on the Xbox 360 pad is crap, but at least their version works a treat online. Unfortunately, the PC online game is still experiencing problems – we've been hassling Konami about it for weeks, and will keep you posted on developments.

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

It seems we just can't get away from the moral



crusaders out to censor videogames, such as Jack Thompson. They create a lot of (justified) vitriol on forums, but we have to keep on reminding ourselves that all creative media go through this. A perfect example is the comic-book industry. In the 1950s, the kids who read comics were growing up and making them, so they made them for adults like themselves as well as kids. Then non-comic readers in positions of power found a medium they believed entirely read by children, suddenly getting mature themes like sex and violence. A book called *Seduction Of The Innocent*, written by Dr Fredric Wertham, the Jack Thompson of the 50s, threw the industry back 30 years. However, in less time than that, they got the courage to pick up where they left off and comics became a real, respected medium. Chris Capel

As the great French composer Claude Debussy once said: "A work of art, or an effort to create beauty, will always be regarded by some people as a personal attack." This describes Jack Thompson's reactionist stance on videogames perfectly. Now, enough of that, back to the nob gags... [PZ]



That 16 page 1&1 demo mag in March issue truly roxx! Please tell me when the mag launches so I start my subscription in time! =) BadBillyBollx (BF2)

Dear PCZONE. Can u tell me if its worth buying Vista? I cant stand the thought of havin to replace all my drivers before anythin works. Love Nigel P. xx

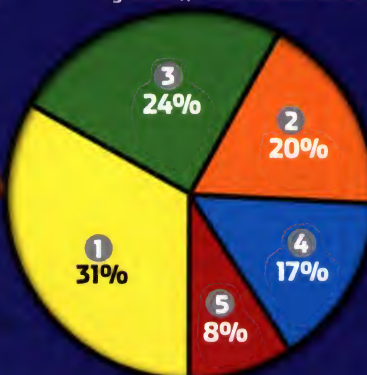
Gordan Freeman must reek under his HEV suit. Blood, zombie guts, sweat (urine and poo as well presumably). Seriously, when does he shower? Sam

TEXTS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN 160 CHARACTERS LONG, SO PAY ATTENTION! To text PC ZONE, send your messages to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leaving a space, then continuing with your text – and don't forget to include your name.

By texting PC ZONE, you're agreeing to receive details of future offers and promotions from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties, that may or may not include double-glazing salesmen, pornographers and Hoxton fin-wearing marketing scumbags. If you don't want to receive info relating to future offers and promotions, please text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate. Bargain.

The Big Question

If caught stalking somebody (STALKER cover, geddit?), what excuse would you use?



- 1 "Lots of people look like me. It's an easy mistake to make." 31%
- 2 "My cat loves pressing those numbers on the phone and breathing heavily." 20%
- 3 "I always sleep naked, and how was I to know her window pane wasn't my bed?" 24%
- 4 "I'm sorry, it's just that she looks like my dead wife, whom I definitely didn't kill." 17%
- 5 "Videogames made me do it!" 8%

**Your struggle is timeless.
Your enemy is immortal...**

With an incredibly deep story, lush environments, PC-enhanced gameplay, and new characters, fighting styles, weapons, and items, the Jade Empire experience has never been more compelling. In this spectacular action-RPG Special Edition, your choices and actions will determine the fate of the entire Jade Empire.

JADE EMPIRE SPECIAL EDITION

Special Edition includes Jade Empire art book and poster, plus exclusive in-game content

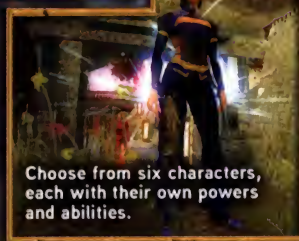
"Offers the kind of role-playing, story, and memorable characters you'd expect from a BioWare RPG." **GameSpot**

Witness a world of breathtaking beauty and vivid combat action.

Interact with an abundance of fascinating characters.



Master new fighting styles inspired by classic martial arts films.



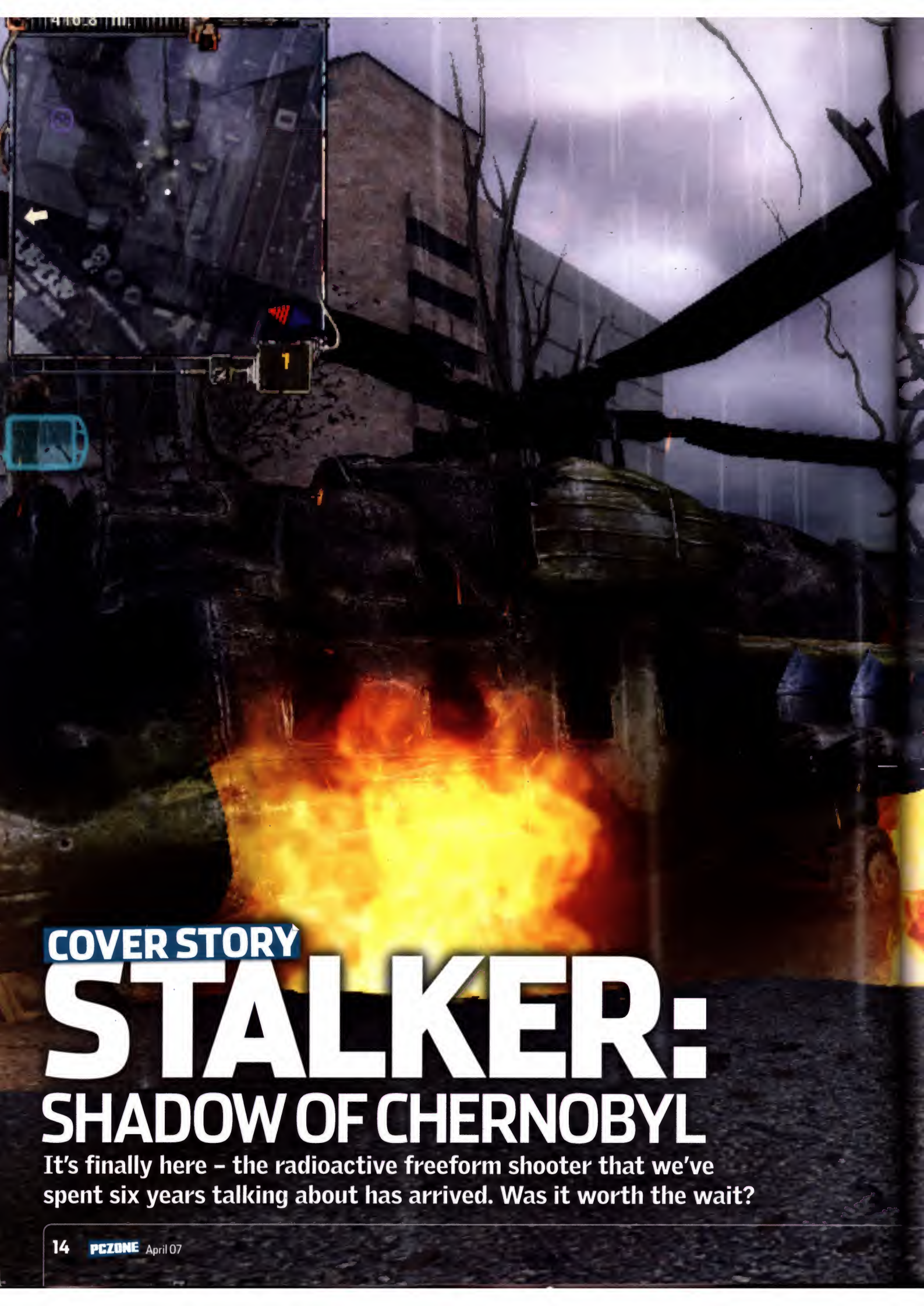
Choose from six characters, each with their own powers and abilities.



BIOWARE
CORP



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COVER STORY

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

It's finally here – the radioactive freeform shooter that we've spent six years talking about has arrived. Was it worth the wait?



THERE'S NOTHING QUITE as bracing as a brisk walk in the countryside. Strapping some beneficial radioactive materials to your belt, foraging dead bodies for ammunition, then watching the wild dogs scamper around trying to eat everything around them, before being shot in the head by a passing Stalker. But why keep yourself above ground when there are so many darkened bunkers where you can be eviscerated, bullet-ridden, munched upon and scared shitless? After so, so long, *STALKER* is finally here. But the big question now is – should you care? Read on to find out...

PAGE
56





PCZONE

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming

CANNON FODDER

HAVING GROWN UP on a farm, I've always been surrounded by shotguns – for shooting pheasants, foxes and the like or simply waving at townies who stray off the public footpath. I was never particularly fond of them though, certainly not as avid a fan as some of my relatives who can name every brand of cartridge, every gun and everything you can legally blow the brains out of in the UK. Guns never did anything for me; I thought they were pretty dull.

Who knew then, that one day I would have a favourite shotgun (the Pancor Jackhammer), a favourite machine gun (the AR 9mm), a favourite assault rifle (AK-47) and considerable wisdom on the subject of bullets – whether they be AP, FMJ, JSP or whatever. Thanks to PC games, I have knowledge of armament trivia that would put many an insane military dictator to shame.

But if you stand back from the issue a bit, isn't that just shit-your-pants terrifying? On paper it is, and indeed it's further fuel for the 'games = violence' brigade; but having shot real guns in the general direction of living things when I was younger (and never hit anything thank god), I know that firing a gun in real life is very, very different. It's heavy, it's loud, it bloody kills your shoulder and all the while there's a voice in your head screaming 'this doesn't feel safe!' Videogame shooting is a million miles away from the real thing. At least, that's my take on it. I'd be interested to hear your thoughts on the matter.

Will Porter

Will Porter, deputy editor

KING OF QUAKE

Exclusive! We chat to legendary id software exec producer Kevin Cloud on all things *Quake Wars*

www.enemyterritory.com | ETA: When it's done

Q So how did our local heroes Splash Damage react when they got the *Quake* licence?

A "It's difficult to judge initial reaction, as Paul (Wedgwood – head of Splash Damage) and I tend to discuss the next game while we're working on the current one. So we were making *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* and I talked about a couple of ideas we wanted to do with the next *ET* – such as vehicles you could hop into and drive around, more extensive maps and so on. What we were really looking at was advancing the storytelling element and this notion of asymmetry. In *ET*, you have two teams opposed, with one advancing and one defending – but by playing with spawn times, what we did was create the sense

of an advancing force that has more people and a defending force that has limited resources, even though you have the same number of people on each side. We thought this asymmetry would be cool if we did it in the *Quake* universe.

"We also had the idea of showing how and why the war started between the Strogg and GDF, which was the storyline in *Quake II*. Over a period of time the ideas came together between us and Splash Damage. The guys there have a great group, and just took the *Quake* universe idea into *ET*, adding a lot of their own ideas too."

How do id Software work with Splash Damage? Is it similar to your relationship with *Quake 4* devs Raven?

"It varies – Raven are a big team, very

established, with a large team of internal management closely involved with publishers Activision, who own them. A lot of what we discuss with them is concepts, game ideas, technology – back and forth between John Carmack and Tim Willits (the id mainstay who oversaw *Quake 4*).

"With them, we're very focused just on the game elements. With Splash Damage it's almost a daily conversation, almost like we're in the same office space – we're up all night on ICQ talking to each other. When SD first started on *ET* they had a small team, and we knew we had to work together to build them up so they could accomplish their first game – looking over the guys they were bringing in, talking about how they would approach concept art – all types of fun stuff."



He looks scary, but has a hell of a time fitting through doors.

STOP PRESS!

OMG BLOG

We've gone all 21st century, and now have blogs that we'll constantly forget to update! Check out our inane ramblings at www.pczone.co.uk!

GRAY AREA

Tolkien RPG *Lord Of The Rings: The Gray Council* has been indefinitely suspended – meaning that it may not ever happen. Filthy EA hobbitses...

BAD NEWS FOR GORDON

HL2: Episode Two has been delayed yet again. Valve have now set a release date for the *HL2/TF2/Portal* package as next winter. Cue deafening tutting sound...

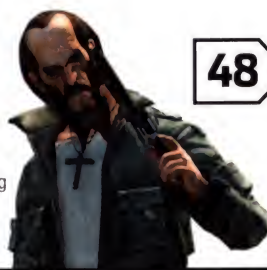
24 Uncle Vista

It's going to change the world forever. We try our best to hold on to a stable bit of floor.



36 The Crossing

The developers of *Dark Messiah* are working on something rather baffling called CrossPlay...



48 Clive Barker

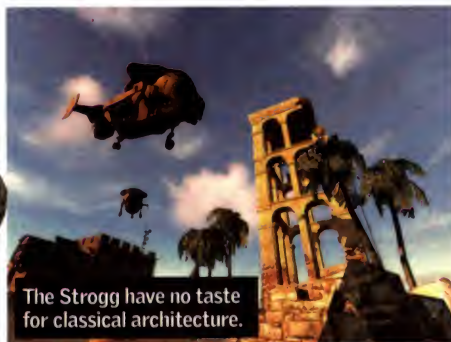
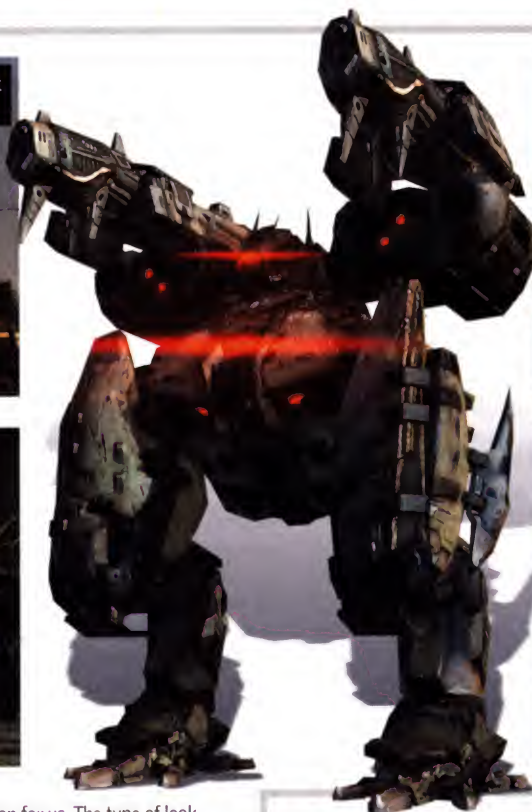
The real-life Clive doesn't want to tear your soul apart, and his house probably smells of cats.



They can take our lives, but not our discount liquor stores!



The Strogg suck up the guts of the dead. Charming!



The Strogg have no taste for classical architecture.



You boys need to invent the BFG, quick-smart.

In terms of gameplay, what's been the standout moment so far in *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* for you?

"I think it's building on the ideas we already had in *Enemy Territory* – the gameplay itself is the strongest element for me. In a lot of multiplayer games, the gameplay is just back and forth – you can get 10 points, I can get 10 points. In the *ET* format you have these objectives that once they're yours, you keep them – the enemy can't take them back. There's an immediacy to that – the most fun is that moment when you achieve an objective yourself or help someone. That's a very strong feeling from a gameplay point of view. On the defence side meanwhile, there's a tremendous amount of excitement from preventing your opponents' progress – if you're the lone soldier that takes out the guy who was about to finish an objective."

If the new 'mega-texture' technology proves successful, will you use it in any other id games?

"Yes, absolutely. John Carmack is very strong on this direction for the technology. It gives us the ability to have huge detail but low memory on the graphics card, which is obviously a great

combination for us. The type of look you can achieve in the maps and the environments is something you just don't see in any other game – other games can't even approach ours. It's a powerful thing for us, and you have to be careful with it because it allows so much artistic freedom that you can be overwhelmed by it. But it's like anything else, in that you have to balance it with all the other jobs you have to do. With *Quake Wars*, John created a framework for the technology, then the excellent *ET* coders took it and built upon it, and made it what it is today. We're certainly going to be taking that, building upon it further and using it in other id games."

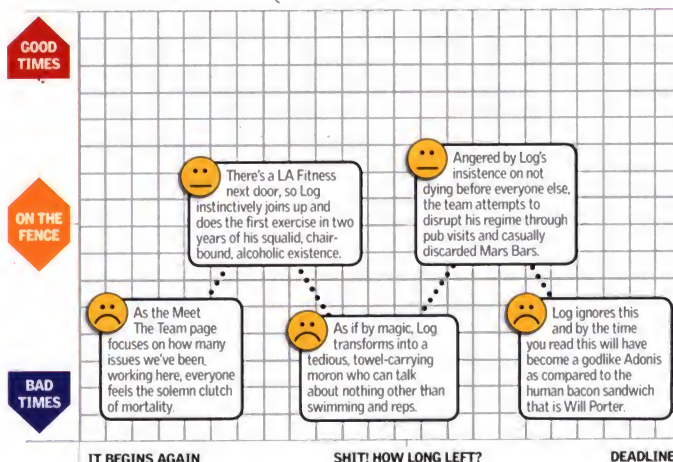
Finally, what's next for the *Enemy Territory* series?

"I have a lot of guesses, but I can't really say. We're keen to start on a new world in a new *ET*, building on what we've done. When you work on a game you get a ton of ideas, and sometimes you have gameplay mechanics that won't fit into the structure – you can't just plug them in. They're just sitting on a table – ideas that myself and Paul have talked about. It will certainly be something to look forward to..."

STUFF

SiN Episodes' distinct state of wobbliness – what with the departure of studio directors, project managers and the like – has been made even more wobbly by the acquisition of developer Ritual by a company called MumboJumbo, who you won't have heard of. While a second instalment hasn't been ruled out, the company is more geared towards 'casual gaming', so don't expect to see a return any time soon...

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

In the beginning was the word, and that word was fanfiction. Pavel Barter reads between the lines of gaming's literary craze...



Reporter
Pavel Barter

ARE YOU SITTING comfortably? Good, then we'll begin. Fifty years after the whole *Oblivion* debacle, vampires have overrun

Tamriel. A creature has gained free will and eaten its creator in *Black & White*. Good and evil versions of *Fable*'s hero are slapping each other on *The Jerry Springer Show*. JC Denton is comparing nano-augmentations with Italian plumber Mario over a cup of tea. Oh, and over in the Mesa compound, Gordon Freeman is fudding G-Man silly and they're both bloody loving it.

The end? Na-ah. Just the beginning. From alternate endings in *F.E.A.R.* to poems about farming simulators, fanfiction runs the gamut from the sublime to the stupid – it's flooded the Internet with a tsunami of tall tales. Henry Jenkins, a director of media studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), has written numerous books about the subject and reckons we've seen it all before.

"For thousands of years, human beings liked to tell and invent stories about their cultural heroes. In the 20th

century, we pushed a lot of that tradition underground by creating a mass-media culture where we assumed that the stories belonged to corporations, and the corporations told the official versions. Fanfiction emerges from left-over audiences who are not fully served by media property."

CHEERS GENE

When modern fanfic first reared its head, it had pointy ears. After the initial cancellation of *Star Trek* in 1969, Trekkies dreamt up their own Spock-tacular plotlines and published the results in fanzines. Over the years, fanfic subject matter expanded to include everything from *EastEnders* to *The Bible* – and now games. "Videogames introduce vividly drawn characters and gesture towards narrative, but they don't fully develop back-stories around those characters," says Jenkins.

The bigger the game's 'canon' – its fictional universe – the more fanfic content can be created. The likes of *Final Fantasy*, *Elder Scrolls* and *Warcraft* inspire libraries of literature, although even *Pong* has a story to tell. Budding scribe SickleYield describes his creative motivation: "While I play, I'm constantly

asking myself, 'What if?', 'Why?' and 'How?'. 'What does it really feel like to be an Undead and not just an outside viewer seeing them as villains?'; or, 'Why are there so few beast race vampires in *Oblivion*?'"

Athenaprime, lightsaber-swinging moderator at kotorfanmedia.com, continues: "We see a lot of novelisations of the events in the *KOTOR* games – action-adventure, drama and romance, as well as character studies and even some epic poetry."

Fanfic has many faces. Sequels and prequels are in high demand – like 'Planet Of The Domz' by Lt. Wyoming, set six months after the events of *Beyond Good & Evil*. Some authors 'recreate game experiences' – in 'Freeman Falls' (Chin-Chilla Boy) the Gordon-ator mostly burns undead and shoots Combine in the head.

Others slide down the parody chute, with chuckle-some narratives such as 'Max Payne And The Holy Grail' (Joseph 'Maniac' Cirillo III) or 'Grand Theft Auto: Big Brother' (lordmasterkris). The latter offers by way of description: 'The three main *GTA* characters are forced to live in the same house, along with others who will be added.' Meanwhile, crossover stories attract unlikely pairings such as *Mario/Sonic* or *KOTOR/Buffy*.

DIRTY SCRIBES

At the seedier end of the spectrum is XXX-rated erotic game fanfiction. Ooh missus! Zombies are momentarily forgotten in this excerpt from a *Resident Evil* spin-off: "Chris stopped kissing to lift Jill's skirt a little higher. He leaned over and knocked everything off his desk. 'Chris, faster! Faster!' When their breathing was under control, Chris said: 'You want to go out tomorrow?' Jill said: 'We really should discuss a plan to attack Umbrella.'"

Other dirty tales include 'Night of the Hist', set in *Oblivion*'s universe ("Oh by the Nine," he thought in desperation, feeling a heat in his loins"); or 'Barbie

The forbidden love of Kirk and Spock kick-started fanfiction.



Garry's Mod now adds pictures to fanfic words.



Lara: unabashed queen of fanfiction erotica.

SAM FISHERS new hat
by Jon "Log" Blyth



"Give me a nice hat please Sonic the Hedgehog"
said Sam "ALL THE NICE HAT ARE IN THE
BACK" said Sonic and ~~they~~ he nodded
solemnly. "That sounds like the kind of hat I am
after" said Sam Fisher, and he did the splits
thinking about it on his head. "STOP RIGHT
THERE SAM FISHER FIRST YOU MUST UNDERGO
THREE TASKS ONE OF WHICH IS SEXY"

Sims' ("Barbie was the proud new owner of her very own website dedicated to her favourite kind of porn: Sims porn!"). Don't be too quick to judge though – what sounds like the dirty mac brigade turns out to be from the pen of the fairer sex.

SUGAR AND SPICE

"If I had to make a guess, I'd say that most of our members are female," states Dark Avenger, head tech of the leading adult fanfiction website (AFF). You what? Henry Jenkins from MIT concurs.

"Erotic fanfiction is heavily written by women. It's as much about getting inside the heads of the characters as it gets inside their bodies. Most male pornography is about anonymous sex, but fanfiction sex is between characters we care about. Even if the story is pure plumbing, as fans would say, it's still sex in a relationship."

Random Scribbles, a prolific erotic fanfic writer and a young mother, says: "The vast majority of authors on AFF are female. Most of the stories cater to straight female fantasies. I've made several online friends through my writing – fellow writers, all female, either attached or sexually satisfied singles aged between 20-35." Her story, 'Chance Encounter', is all about

Lara Croft getting her tomb raided by the Prince of Persia.

"I love writing fanfic with strong, serious female characters and strong yet more light-hearted males, so it fits my style well," says Scribbles. "I enjoy writing sexually charged, argumentative dialogue and I felt that Lara and the Prince could achieve this kind of rapport believably, especially if forced to co-operate in an adventure."

Ms Croft spends most of her fanfiction tenure in a permanent state of undress, but we owe it all to her. Henry Jenkins explains: "Lara Croft kick-started the first videogame fanfiction phenomenon. She's an icon of female empowerment, but there wasn't a lot of back-story about her and women ended up filling in the blanks."

SEXY BOYS

The slash fanfic genre, which creates homoerotic relationships between characters, further confounds expectations. Slash stories first appeared in the 1970s, as horny Trekkies wrote about Spock and Kirk getting frisky. In today's game setting, that means a gay old time between the likes of Tommy and Lance from *GTA: Vice City*. Yet, once again, the authors are predominantly female.



Tall stories

Ever thought you could write your favourite games better? Read on...



Tetris

Title: Tears in Red, Gold and Green

Author: K Project

Description: A sonnet to the Soviet brain-boiler.

Excerpt: "They gather in heaven and fall like rain. And form a jagged, forbidding mountain."



Crazy Taxi

Title: Crazy Taxi: Chosen Ones

Author: Killyougu

Description: Former cabbies turned superhumans fight "a great evil".

Excerpt: "Earl didn't mind reckless driving, but there was one thing he hated... Scratches."



Lemmings

Title: Freedom For Lemmings

Author: enchantedwriter72

Description: A lemming leads a rebellion against the 'The Cursor'.

Excerpt: "I am sick of my life. No-one cares if my feet get tired. No-one cares that we fall through trap doors."



Pong

Title: Pong

Author: Insert-Blank

Description: The ball ponders its existence and quest to be free.

Excerpt: "The ball hated the paddles. Fear of the void beyond was nothing to its hatred of those white walls."

"Erotic fanfiction is heavily written by women. Male pornography is about anonymous sex, but fanfic sex is between characters we care about"


Henry Jenkins, director of media studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

"It's all about re-inventing masculinity to reflect a more emotionally intimate style of male behaviour," explains MIT's Henry Jenkins.

BIGGEST FAN

Fanfiction is more than just a hobby for frustrated loners, you see. Most major science-fiction writers emerged from sci-fi fandom, and most comic writers were themselves fans. Consider *Dr Who*: the producers and writers of the new show grew out of fandom during the period when it was off the air. Games should be equally grateful – Will Wright has often stated that the Sims grew to fame after women played in order to generate images for fanfiction.

Ultimately, all we really need to know is this: is game fanfic any good?

"I'd argue that in most cases, fanfiction is better than the professional stuff," says Jenkins. And with that, fanfiction writers lived happily ever after – in a land where Gordon Freeman plays poker with Sam Fisher and Max Payne wears ladies underwear. Amen. 

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

Fuelled by huge quantities of caffeine and obscene American meat portions, **Anthony Holden** checks out the latest pretender to the *Battlefield* crown...

DEVELOPER Kaos Studios PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE www.frontlinesgame.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 178

The rides at Thorpe Park keep getting weirder.



Never, ever, put five Mentos in a Coke bottle.



THE LOWDOWN

New *Battlefield*-style game from the *Desert Combat* team



Moving 'frontline' keeps action fierce and focused



Remote-control 'drones' are ace



Comprehensive solo campaign



We're still not convinced by the single-player



WHEN *BATTLEFIELD 1942* first rolled off the production lines in 2002, it came as something of a revelation. Sure, we'd played shooters with vehicles before, and yeah, we'd seen games with huge, open levels; but in *BF1942* it just seemed a lot more liberating, uncomplicated and, well, fun. It was, without us really knowing it, the combined-arms action-shooter we'd been waiting for.

However, as you'll know if you played the game, the popularity of the core game was soon matched and even eclipsed by a free mod called *Desert Combat*, a modern-day remix based on the first Gulf War. At the time, this was a source of some snide amusement – that EA's ground-breaking shooter had been so easily bettered by a home-brewed mod. But make no mistake,

Desert Combat may have been distributed as a free download, but the team responsible were no bunch of dabblers, students and wannabes. In fact, Trauma Studios were a 'proper' development team, bankrolled by EA, with a New York office and everything.

I LOVE NEW YORK

A couple of quiet years later and the *DC* team are back, with a new name, a new publisher and a brand-new game called *Frontlines: Fuel Of War*. Having been big fans of *DC*'s oil-wrangling action, we could hardly turn down the opportunity to journey to New York to play the new game – and of course, buy a cheap iPod.

Arriving at Kaos Studios' plush HQ in downtown Manhattan, we immediately

feel on familiar territory. Not just because all US development studios look pretty much identical, but because at a glance, *Frontlines* is a very similar game to *Battlefield 2*. It has the same vast, open-world battles, the same brimming catalogue of vehicles and weapons, the same arcade sensibility. You click on a map to spawn, you jump in and out of vehicles, you capture points, you rack up kills. It's set 20 years hence, so the lethal arsenal has a bit of a 'near-future' feel to it, but mostly we're on very safe ground.

But wait just a minute. Despite the broad similarities, Kaos Studios have a few new tricks up their sleeves, and it's these that could make *Frontlines* the next logical step for the genre.

ETA
AUTUMN

THE STORY SO FAR...
KAOS STUDIOS
KAOS
STUDIOS

Trauma centre
In 2002, Trauma Studios begin *Desert Combat*, a popular mod for *BF1942*.

2002



Dice New York
DC is such a hit that BF creators DICE buy Trauma and put them to work on *BF2*.

2004



Not in the game
Next, it's EA's turn to buy DICE. Faced with relocation, the Trauma lads promptly quit.

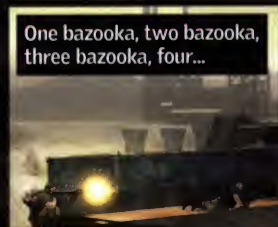
2005



Kaos Unleashed
In late 2005, the core members of Trauma form Kaos Studios and begin work on *Frontlines*.

2005

One bazooka, two bazooka, three bazooka, four...



Not pictured: a tank.



Defending and attacking become virtually synonymous, and nobody is left roving the wastelands wondering where the action is...


General manager Frank DeLise describes their first secret weapon: "The game is based on this 'frontline' mechanic, where a line of objectives or control points moves constantly through the level. At any time there are two or more objectives in the frontline, and you can take them in any order."

EUREKA!

As simple as it sounds, this feature may be a stroke of accidental genius. I say accidental, because it's an idea that evolved largely in single-player, as a way of offering a controlled yet non-linear path through the levels. But in multiplayer, where the frontline is pushed back and forth as the two teams tussle for control of the map, the

frontline device solves one of the biggest problems of the *Battlefield* series.

The problem is this. In *Battlefield*, you generally have to control a number of points that are strewn across the map, which means your forces need to be split between those defending your existing points and those attacking new ones. In practice, what this usually means is chaos, because nobody wants to defend and everyone has different ideas about which point to attack next.

Frontlines banishes that chaos. Here, everyone is fighting along a single, focused front. Defending and attacking become virtually synonymous, and nobody is left roving the wastelands wondering where the action is. For this reason alone, *Frontlines* 

"This way to the brewery!"



Parking enforcement is a little over the top.





has the potential to be more fun than vanilla *Battlefield* ever was.

DRONING ON

Of course, it doesn't end there. As mentioned, *Frontlines* is set two decades in the future, amid a global scuffle over dwindling energy supplies (the key protagonists being the Red Star Alliance and the Western Coalition). As a result, many of the weapons are mildly futuristic, from mini-nukes to smart air-bursting grenades. "Everything is based off where the military is going all over the world," says DeLise, a self-confessed military nut. "It's all based on real-world technology – we've just added what we call a 'Kaos factor' to make it more interesting."

Without doubt, the most enjoyable cutting-edge gadgets on offer are the 'drones' – remote-control vehicles that can be used to scout out enemies (and of course blow them up). "The recon drone is like a mini-helicopter," explains DeLise. "To deploy it you just throw it, and then you can fly it around in first-person. It has a function that will flash up red tags and pinpoint where people are hiding – which makes it great for hunting out snipers."

There's also a remote-control buggy that works in similar fashion. But while

this is all real military technology, the 'Kaos factor' means that the buggies are super-quick and loaded with C4, making for plenty of laughs when you deploy them under vehicles and unsuspecting personnel. In testing, it was also discovered that recon drones could be loaded with a satchel charge, making them even more satisfying as anti-sniper contraptions.

BONUS POINTS

After thrashing the multiplayer with the Kaos team for a solid afternoon, there are two things that stand out clearly: the superb frontline mechanic, which serves to focus the action on a small, yet shifting area of the map, and the highly entertaining RC drones. In other respects, the game is a fairly conventional team-based shooter, albeit with great attention to detail and some excellent level design.

Incidentally, the levels tend to come in three varieties: some are geared towards infantry assault, with lots of interiors and tight spaces; others are a bit more open, with space for a handful of large vehicles; while a third type is all wide open spaces, ripe for helicopters, tanks and tactical nukes. It's all good, solid stuff and should provide a good deal of gameplay variety.



War is brown and badly lit.



Have some of this, ozone layer.

Role with it

Everyone has a role to play in *Frontlines* multiplayer



"Fire a bazooka up your arse? Well, OK then."



Frontlines is all about giving you choice, and as such there are no strict player classes in multiplayer. Instead, you get to mix and match 'loadouts' and 'roles'. Your loadout gives you a basic weapon set, like rocket launcher, sniper rifle and so forth. Your role, meanwhile, gives you certain abilities and advantages on the battlefield.

For example, with the Ground Support role you get to drop emplacements such as mini-guns and grenade launchers, as well as repair vehicles and heal people. With Air Support, you can call in precision air strikes, cluster bombs and tactical nukes. Still another role allows you to deploy various drones.

All the roles are governed by rank, so you start off, say, Air Support rank one, which gives you air strikes. Upgrade to rank two and you get cluster bombs and so on. According to Kaos's general manager Frank DeLise, this tends to create a huge crescendo at the end of a session, as people start hitting the higher ranks and dropping nukes on each other. In the words of Rocky Balboa, it ain't over till it's over.



"No, my helicopter, mine!"



That's the multiplayer anyway. But if there's one thing Kaos are absolutely adamant about, it's that their single-player game is not going to be a mere sideshow – a hastily bolted-on afterthought, as it has perennially been with every generation of *Battlefield*.

"From the beginning, we wanted to make sure that the single-player campaign was a huge focus," confirms DeLise. "A lot of FPSs out there, you get either a single-player infantry game or a multiplayer all-weapons war game, but you don't get both – and that's our goal. Our single-player is a proper, cinematic, story-driven campaign."

Not only this, but it has an ambitious design brief: completely unscripted, non-linear gameplay. DeLise explains: "We didn't want our game to be like a

bot-match. We didn't want it to feel like just a bunch of AI fighting you. We wanted the enemies to seek cover, flank you, talk to each other and act as a squad, so it feels like real people in a real area instead of scripted events. There's nothing scripted, it's all contextual."

YOU'RE FREE!

As far as DeLise is concerned, heavily scripted shooters like *Call Of Duty* are old hat, played out, yesterday's news. What he wants to do is bring the level of choice you get in multiplayer games like *Battlefield* into the arena of solo gaming.

"We really wanted to break out of the box and do a more non-linear experience," he says. "So we don't tell you, 'Right, this is a sniper mission, now



K9 was never like this.

you're a sniper.' You get to choose at every turn – do I want to be a sniper, a heavy gunner? Do I want to drive a tank? And how do I want to take this town?"

As a result, the levels are completely open and your actions more or less uninhibited – you can go wherever you want, take objectives in any order, pick up any weapon, drive any vehicle. And while you have a squad fighting alongside you, they pretty much just follow your lead, staying close and engaging enemies as you encounter them. The only real structure comes from the frontline mechanic, which gives you a constant sense of purpose, as well as working as a checkpoint-save system.

NOT QUITE THERE YET

It's an admirable approach, and in many ways what all games should be working towards. However, we're not convinced they've nailed it yet. The action is certainly fierce – what DeLise describes as "*Call Of Duty* on crack" – but from what we saw, the non-scripted gameplay serves to highlight a number of predictable AI deficiencies.

In short, they're simply not smart enough. They flank, they take cover, they drive vehicles, but in no way do

The power of healing

Frontlines panders to console audience with auto-health system



Feel his pain.

One potentially controversial and audience-splitting aspect of *Frontlines* is the way it manages player health. Instead of a health bar or numerical readout, the screen simply gets darker as you take more hits – but if you have a bit of a rest and stop getting blown up for a while, your shattered limbs and ruptured organs magically regenerate. It's a system pioneered by *Halo*, and subsequently picked up by console titles such as *Call Of Duty 2* and *Gears Of War*.

Clearly, it's no coincidence that *Frontlines* is also coming out on Xbox 360, and it's just another example of PC gaming tastes being subjugated to the needs of more feeble, couch-based organisms. Obviously, we hardcore types would have preferred accurate weapon damage, a complicated zone-based injury system and full, bloody dismemberment. *Soldier Of Fortune 3*, where are you when we need you?

they feel like real people, with all the ingenuity and cunning that goes with that. AI simply isn't that advanced yet.

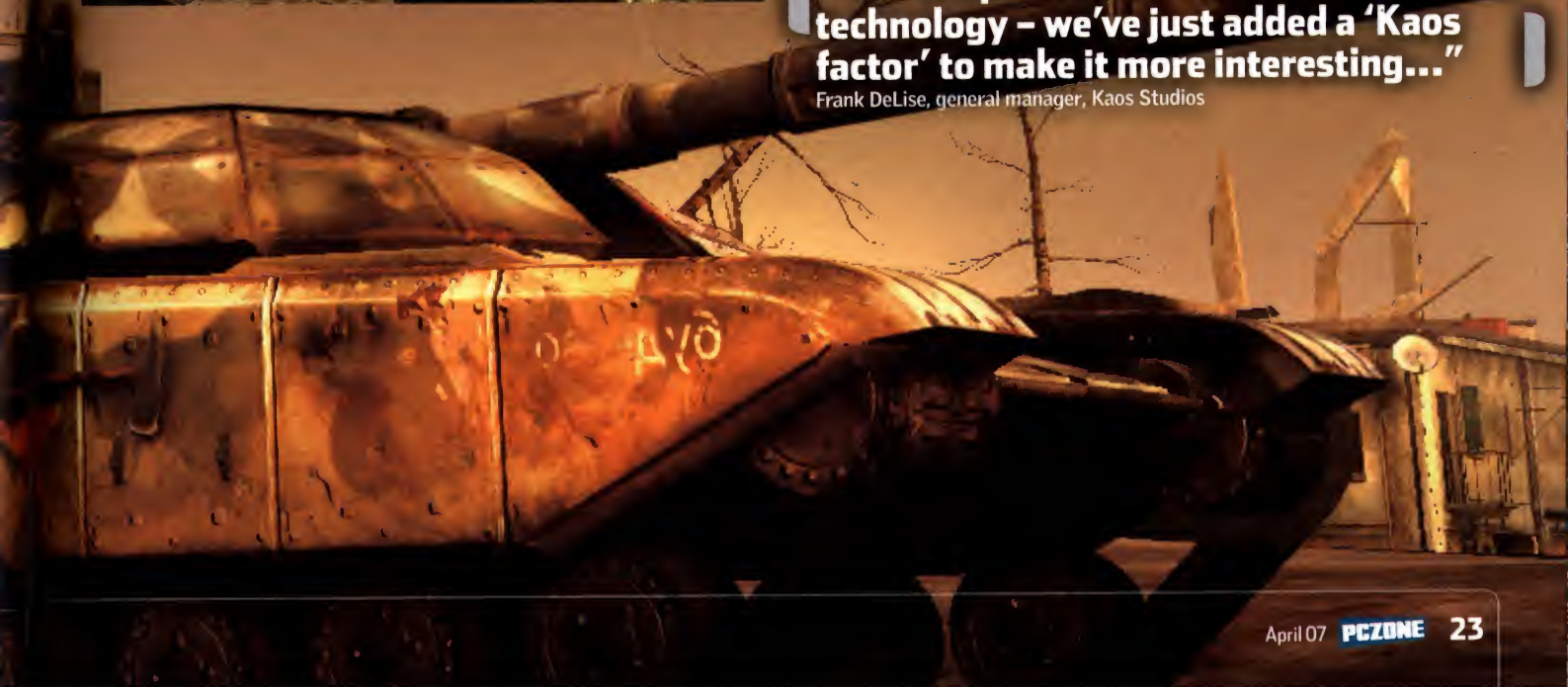
Admittedly, we've only played the first couple of levels, and the game isn't due out for another six months. But on present form we suspect *Frontlines* will still be perceived first and foremost as an online game. Luckily, with the multiplayer looking as impressive as it does, that may be no bad thing. **PC7**



Helicopters and tanks: natural foes.

"The weapons are all based on real-world technology – we've just added a 'Kaos factor' to make it more interesting..."

Frank DeLise, general manager, Kaos Studios





VISTA: SHOULD YOU BE ARSED?

It's here. It's in the shops. But do you need to upgrade right now? The **PC ZONE** team ponder the merits of early adoption...



WILL PORTER DX10 ENVY

"I'm not buying Vista – not for a while anyway. Don't get me wrong, I like some of what it does – the way it assesses your system, gives it a score and an indication of what it can and can't run. It looks pretty too – but the only real reason I can see to upgrade is DX10. I obviously want this, need this and can't live without this in the long-term, but right now, I simply can't justify it. The only game I desperately need to see in DX10 is *Crysis*, and much as I hate to say it, if *Alan Wake* is tied intractably to Vista, then I can always play it on a friend's machine. As a long-standing PC gamer I hate having my hand held as well, so the push for age limits, games installing themselves alongside *Minesweeper* and the growth of 'Live Anywhere' really alienates me. Eventually I'll make the jump, but until I genuinely see a reason to shift up a gear in operating systems then I'll stay right where I am, thank you very much."



SUZY WALLACE GATES TO HELL

"Ah, operating systems. I've battled with quite a few of them over the years, screaming obscenities at the blue screen of death and the mess that was plug-and-play. But I'm afraid that I'm quite partial to XP; for the first time since the heady days of my 486DX, I don't have to contend with a crash every day, pretty much everything I've plugged in works first time and I don't have to re-start my machine every half hour either. What else do you need from an OS? In any other case, I'd give Microsoft the Jehovah's witness treatment – a polite "no thanks" while quickly slamming the door in their face. But thanks to DX10's exclusivity to Vista, I'll now need to update my machine, my graphics card *and* my OS. Talk about making consoles seem like the cheap option! For now, I'll stay clear, but it might not be long till my hand is forced into buying something I don't really want or need (I'm looking at you, *Crysis*). Nice one, Microsoft."



Glowing string combos: exclusive to DX10.





The last person to upgrade flees the Microsoft helicopter...

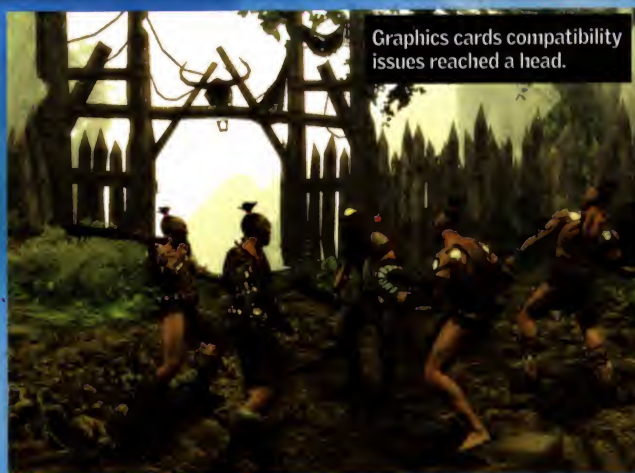


JAMIE SEFTON OPTIMISTIC MUSINGS

"Look, there's no doubt that this is the best version of Windows yet – it's smooth, easy to understand, has some great visual features including the 3D flipping of windows, is more secure and has better integration with multimedia. If you're using a PC just for spreadsheets, music, the Internet, looking at photos of cute cats and playing the odd game of chess, then there's no reason not to upgrade now – unless you have an ageing PC or are confused by the numerous different versions available. But if, like me, you're after the next step in PC gaming such as the glorious eye-splitting loveliness of DX10 titles such as *Crysis*, then you're better off waiting for the moment. Why? Compatibility. Anyone who's gone through an OS change (remember Windows 95 to Windows 98?) knows that there's pain – usually involving those temperamental sound and graphics cards. Until the Vista-only DX10 games really start flooding in – beginning with *Alan Wake* and *Crysis* later this year – you're better off sticking with your tried-and-tested system and boring old XP. At least for six months. Oh, but that new Vista interface does look gorgeous..."



Because *Minesweeper's* a game, too.

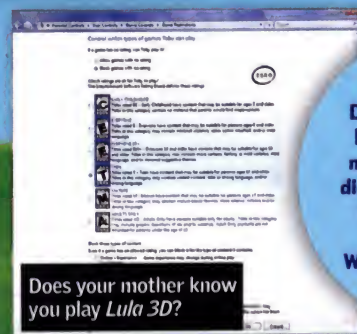


Graphics cards compatibility issues reached a head.



JON BLYTH NO MONEY ANYWAY

"I'm easily hypnotised. I'm wowed by swish, and I genuinely feel more productive in an environment where things zip about with the grace of a manicured swan. I'm looking forward to getting a working copy of Vista, because I want something new and exciting to install and explore. I know it's hopeless, glitter-blind idiocy, but I want this window I'm writing in, right now, to go semi-transparent, 3D and shuffle with all the other windows. I want the words I'm writing now to pipe, warp and flex into a prosaic rainbow. I want to be able to write any old shit and for it to look nice. But... I can't see myself getting it this year. I'm too much of a suspicious old sod to be a true early-adopter, and besides, I used my job at ZONE to justify buying a monster PC on my (still uncleared) credit card. My two decent, DX9-only graphics cards would be too heartbreaking to scrap when – for now, at least – they work so well. I'm excited about upgrading for upgrading's sake; just let me pay for this one first."



Does your mother know you play *Lula 3D*?



STEVE HOGARTY DISMISSIVE SHRUG

"To put it bluntly, I'll be avoiding Vista for as long as possible. Many of the features such as the fancy new widget system and indexed searching are already available for Windows XP if you use Google Desktop (which is free). Windows XP supplies me with everything I need, and I'm not bothered about HD-DVD support. How long will we have to wait before all of our old drivers are compatible too? Plus, the Digital Rights Management malarkey seems a bit too Big Brother-esque. They might not be the Thought Police, but I think Microsoft are taking too much control out of our hands. That said, I'll happily install it on my PC at work, just to see DX10 games at their best. My own PC will be sticking with XP for now though."

ALSO!

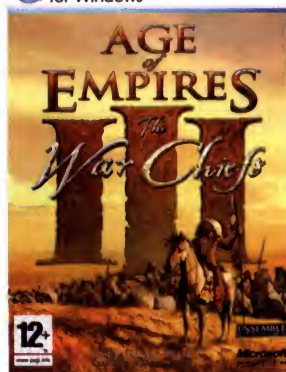
Don't miss Phil Wand's hardware section this month with more Vista discussions and a special two-page feature on how to upgrade to Windows Vista Ultimate (see page 93)...

Shiny new boxes

Will Porter on the thinking behind the Games for Windows brand

Games for Windows

PC CD



In a way, it's slightly annoying having your games branded with an official seal, but you have to admit Microsoft are doing something right with the way PC games are sold. I've always felt a bit of a leper going into a GAME or a Gamestation, trudging to the back and seeing a rack of 'PC DVD' titles where *Carol Vorderman's Sudoku* shares shelf-space with *Civilization IV* as if it's at all acceptable. So it is then that it's nice to see Microsoft pumping some cash in to see us treated as a viable contender to the consoles at the front of the shop. If this happens to the exclusion of games not on the Games for Windows register though, then I'll get grumpy. However, shit box design aside, in our opinion it's a good thing.



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THE MAN WHO KNOWS



The world of Internet journalism is a dangerous, unpredictable place – as was shown this month by the unveiling of tragic news for the entire world of gaming. "Videogame legend **Shigeru Miyamoto** died this morning at his home in Sonobe, Japan," reported a sombre **RPGamer.com**. "The creator of *Super Mario* and *The Legend Of Zelda* series was killed while picking up the morning paper in front of his home; an **eagle** was flying overhead and lost its grip on a **tortoise** it was carrying. The tortoise landed on the back of Miyamoto's neck, **shattering** one of the cervical vertebrae. Pending an **autopsy report**, investigators are assuming he died instantly." A sad day indeed. Despite the fact that a healthy 52-year-old Miyamoto is still very much alive, and the news story attributable to a **'training exercise' gone wrong** rather than a vicious death slur. Clearly this amusing console tale isn't directly within the remit of **PC ZONE**, but it does allow us to make light of the fact that a certain sister website that may well have a three-letter name beginning with **CVG** once calmly reported: "Carmack to develop *Doom 5* from spacestation."

Gold farming – the practice of accruing vast sums of online game currency by chaining **desperate peasants** to PCs in darkened sheds and forcing them to quest to the beat of a **ruthless slave-master**, just so he can sell it on to people **too lazy** to kill fields full of raptors – has taken another step towards **legitimacy**. Or at least, it has in the **MMO-bonkers** land of South Korea, where gold farmers recently formed a trade lobby to represent their interests. The **Digital Asset Distribution Promotion Association (DADPA)** was created in response to noises the Korean government have been making about cracking down on the **dubious trade**, reportedly worth over US\$1 billion a year. This frankly mind-boggling sum gives DADPA some financial clout, though the biggest gold farming operations are thought to be in **China**. The chances of a British offshoot of DADPA are unlikely, even though the idea of **Gordon Brown** patiently sitting through a presentation on the sale of enchanted swords and mana potions was described by one industry insider as "quite amusing."

"The story was attributed to a 'training exercise' gone wrong rather than a vicious death slur"

IN THE BEGINNING...

Genesis Rising goes all biblical on us. With spaceships...

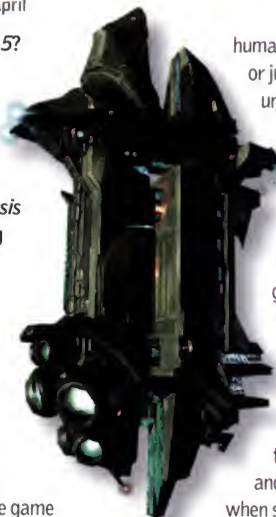
www.genesisrisinggame.com | ETA: April

REMEMBER THE SHIPS in *Babylon 5*? OK, well, maybe you don't. But if you were to check out the DVD boxsets, as well as mumbling things about 'acting' and 'crap effects' in your 21st century snobbery, you'd reflect on how *Genesis Rising* is making a stab at recreating the organic, toned beauty of its Nimbari and Vorlon spaceships.

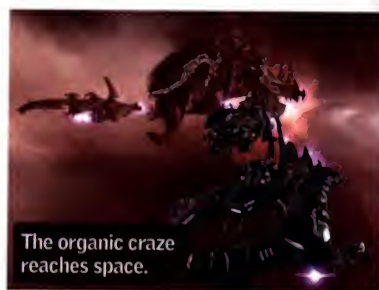
Too nerdy? Maybe. But *Genesis Rising* is increasingly looking like a tonic for forlorn *Babylon 5* (and indeed *Homeworld*) fans – with its genetically modifiable fleets, branching non-linear campaign, alien race relations and ships that bizarrely look like men in deep levels of pain. The game sees you (or you and a friend since there's also a co-op mode) controlling one of three strands of

humanity in the far future (military, church or judicature), attempting to conquer the unknown heart of the galaxy – the very origin of existence itself.

In terms of ship genetics, technology can be stolen or researched, then fiddled with and upgraded on-the-fly – morphing your ships in real time as you jam the various genes into their respective slots. An interesting set-up then, not least since it features gigantic ships with jobs like hauling vast reservoirs full of blood through the galaxy – seeing as once you destroy enemy ships you harvest them for 'blood air' and genes to power and mutate your own creations. In a time when space-loving gamers have been gargling with the piss of *Star Trek: Legacy*, this newcomer can't come soon enough. Please be good!



Beware flying angry statues.



The organic craze reaches space.



Star Trek: Legacy, eat your heart out!

FRAGGING WITH THE ENEMY

In cahoots with 360? *Huxley* producer spills on console crossover

www.huxleyonline.com | ETA: Q4

WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT *Huxley*, with its rival schools of Sapiens and Alternatives knocking pieces out of each other in persistent online cities. But we weren't too sure about the prospect of playing alongside console scum (are you listening Mr Gates?), so we banged on the doors of developers Webzen until game producer Kijong Kang popped his head out.

"Both PC and 360 gamers live in their respective worlds of *Huxley*, where they can buy and sell items, fight in battlegrounds and enjoy quests in their platform's

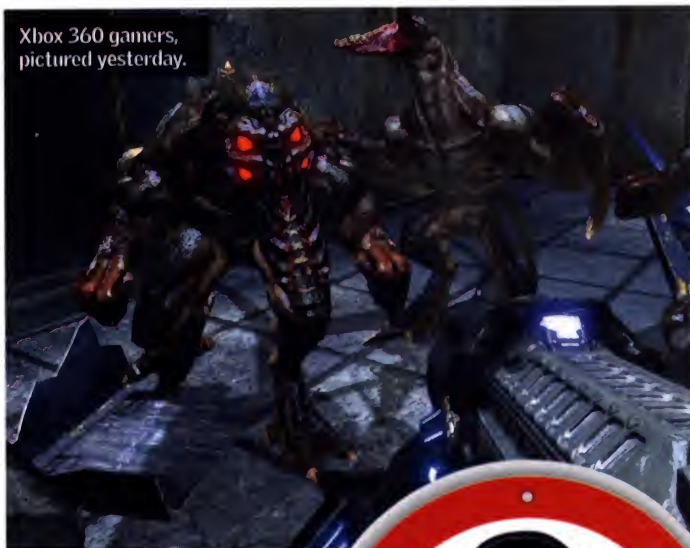
'Persistent World'. When they reach a certain point of gameplay, they can cross over into each other's worlds." Aha! So it's true? Oh *Huxley*, how foolish we were to think you might be quite good...

"We'd like to point out though, that while it's not technically impossible for PC and Xbox players to play in the same battles in *Huxley*, fairness should be guaranteed for all players," corrects Kang. "We decided not to let PC and 360 gamers play on the same battlegrounds as we thought it wouldn't be fun for players with different control systems to fight in the same battles."

Shared content then seems to be the buzzword, rather than shared experience. We may wander the streets of *Huxley*'s beautifully rendered cities with console gamers, but we fight with ourselves alone. Will it work? More in coming issues...



Xbox 360 gamers, pictured yesterday.



E.T. COME HOME

Area-51 may have tanked, but a talented new team hopes to make amends with the promising *Blacksite: Area 51*



This is no time for shadow puppets.

www.blacksitegame.com | ETA: Summer

DECAMPING FROM THE rather guff underground environments of the rather guff *Area-51* and into the alien-infested Nevada town of Rachel, *Blacksite* is a sequel that should raise the stakes set by its not-so-illustrious forebear. Not least, perhaps, because talent from *Deux Ex*, *Thief*, *Splinter Cell* and the co-writer of *BioShock* have all been drafted in to up the quality quota.

A squad-based shooter that sees you and your modern-day cronies fighting hordes of creatures oddly reminiscent of modern updates on B-movie alien fiends, *Blacksite* certainly has its primary

allegiances on console, but should provide giggles for PC brethren to boot. Squad morale affecting gameplay, civilian and military vehicles littering the battlefield and a decent storyline have all raised our eyebrows an iota – and we'll report back if the eyebrow becomes even more arched, perhaps into an expression of shock or joy.



Even better than ALF?



"I don't know what being a heroin addict is like, but I imagine that when they stick that needle in they feel pretty good. I used to turn on *BF1942* and hear that 'bombombom ba BOMBOM' and I'd feel this wash of joy just go over me. Even with those super-long loading times I was like 'I don't care! Cos I know it's coming!'"

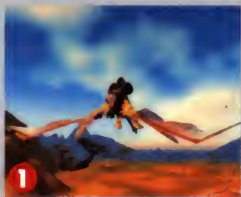
Gas Powered Games' boss Chris Taylor reveals his secret to the world

"I'm a *StarCraft* player myself and I hope it's not a decade (and we launched *StarCraft* in 1998) before I'm here again, celebrating the next game in the series."

Blizzard's Itzik Ben Bassat gets Will Porter all excited, thinking he'd got the scoop on *StarCraft 2*, before saying the EXACT same words to a crowd of 1,000 people

**PCZONE
CHARTS**


- 1 **NEW** **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE**
Issue 179 93%
- 2 — **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007**
Issue 175 90%
- 3 ↓ **FIFA 07**
Issue 174 84%
- 4 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: PETS**
Issue 176 72%
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Issue 175 91%
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Issue 173 93%
- 7 ↑ **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
Issue 174 86%
- 8 ↑ **THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS**
Issue 165 N/A
- 9 ↓ **THE SIMS 2**
Issue 147 82%
- 10 — **WARHAMMER 40K: DOW - DARK CRUSADE**
Issue 175 88%
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Issue 175 69%
- 12 ↑ **AGE OF EMPIRES III**
Issue 162 84%
- 13 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS**
Issue 166 72%
- 14 ↓ **LOTR BFME II: RISE OF THE WITCH KING**
Issue 176 80%
- 15 ↓ **WARHAMMER 40K: MARK OF CHAOS**
Issue 176 82%
- 16 ↑ **GUILD WARS: NIGHTFALL**
Issue 176 89%
- 17 ↓ **THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE**
Issue 161 58%
- 18 **RE** **COMMAND & CONQUER: THE FIRST DECADE**
Issue N/A
- 19 ↓ **AGE OF EMPIRES III: THE WARCHIEFS**
Issue 175 72%
- 20 ↓ **LOTR: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH II**
Issue 167 71%

**1 WORLD OF WARCRAFT:
THE BURNING CRUSADE**

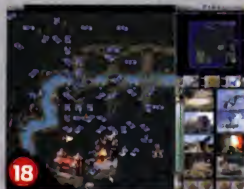
Who can stop the Blizzard juggernaut? At eight million and counting, this one has long legs...

**3 FIFA 07**

Providing, in a virtual sense, the only way this season that Leeds Utd could possibly score from a beautiful 30-yard screamer.

**2 FOOTBALL MANAGER 07**

Fed up with draconian Russian oil barons sniping at you and saying you're shit? Then don't buy *Football Manager 2007*...

**18 C&C: THE FIRST DECADE**

Suggesting that EA are counting on releasing *Command & Conquer: The Second Decade* come 2016. Now that's forward planning...

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

Chow Yun-Fat walks the dinosaur in *Stranglehold*

www.midway.com | ETA: Q2

BEWARE THE WHITE doves. We've just played a new level of the John Woo-produced *Stranglehold*, and you'll be terribly chuffed to know that it's now packed with even more slo-mo, blood-spilling, explodey goodness. Set in a natural history museum, the new area had glass cases displaying rare artefacts, delicate fossils, golden lions and beautiful, priceless vases that can all be smashed, destroyed and blown to tiny bits in the name of justice, courtesy of Midway's Massive D (yep, that's 'D' for Destruction) technology.

Your main character of Inspector Tequila, played by action-movie legend Chow Yun-Fat, now has two spectacular new 'Tequila Bomb' moves, in addition to his 360-degree spin-around-and-shoot-everything combo - Barrage and Precision Aim. Barrage allows you, for a short time, to attack any advancing enemies with a scatter-gun hail of bullets, which we found to be particularly deadly

when used with the shotgun. Precision Aim, meanwhile, is more of a visual gimmick, letting you follow an individual bullet's path all the way to its intended victim, resulting in a cinematic cut-scene of said foe falling back, splurging blood and screaming "Urrgh".

What was also apparent in the latest playtest was the quality of the animation - baddies will drop to the floor when shot in the leg or hold their face if you riddle their heads with lead, while Tequila's face actually screws up in anger when he's attacking. All this, and you can still string moves together with ease, allowing you to storm an area, dive to the floor to take out some enemies, run up the spine of a full-size dinosaur skeleton and finish off some more crooks, before leaping deftly to safety.

We're still no wiser as to whether *Stranglehold* will have the story-depth of *ZONE*-favourite Max Payne, but in the action stakes, the gravel-voiced hero finally has a serious rival.



Chow Yun-Fat wins at Quazar yet again.



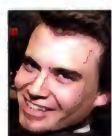
He's just looking for an excuse to run up that dinosaur.



"Hmmm: slow-motion or normal motion for this one?"

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who builds Blizzard's house of cards



BRIAN KIBLER: HEAD DEVELOPER ON WORLD OF WARCRAFT - THE CARD GAME

Former professional player Brian Kibler has been working with trading card powerhouse Upper Deck Entertainment for over two years. Formerly in charge of Marvel heroes taking on those of DC in the Vs System game, he's now in charge of rendering *WOW* in shiny cardboard...

SO how does the card game work, and how does it relate to our Azeroth-bound *WOW* characters?

"Trading Card Games are games in which players collect cards and construct decks of their own design to play against one another. New cards are released in expansion sets that give players more choices about what cards they want to play with. I suppose the biggest component of likening the card game to the online game is using hero cards. In the *WOW* TCG, each player has a hero card that represents him in the game at all times, and determines what cards that player can use in his deck - for instance, an Alliance Priest can use Alliance allies, priest abilities and gear a priest could use."

Is it true that some cards can give you bonuses in the online *World Of Warcraft*? What sort of stuff can you get?

"There are two ways to get cosmetic upgrades for your *WOW* MMO character through the TCG. The first are what we call Loot Cards, which are alternate versions of

existing cards in the set that have scratch-off codes that can be redeemed online. There are also UDE points, which are accumulated from points cards in each pack, which can be traded in for another set of codes from our UDE Points Store. So in-game rewards include unique tabards, pets, an ogre disguise trinket and a turtle mount - things like that..."

What famous artists have you got on your payroll? How did they get involved?

"A number of amazing artists have contributed to the game, and the roster continues to grow. The first set included work by Todd MacFarlane (*Spawn*), Dave Dorman (famed *Star Wars* illustrator), Greg Staples and Alex Horley, along with Blizzard's own Samwise and Justin Thiravat, among many others."

So what's your favourite card?

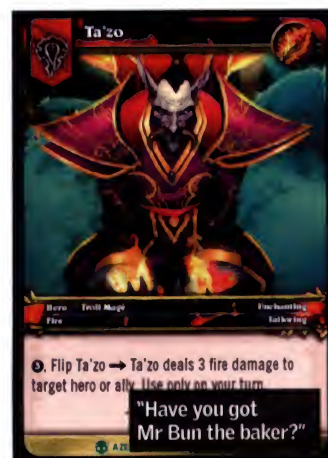
"Fury. Although I have to say that I'm kind of biased, because it's based on my pet in online *WOW*."

Do the guys at Blizzard play the card game? What sort of feedback do they give you?

"The Blizzard guys love the game. There's a few of them who we work with very closely, and they have their own playtest group at their office. They run tournaments every week, which draw more players all the time."

With the release of *The Burning Crusade*, has your game changed?

"You won't see the impact of *The Burning Crusade* expansion until our first expansion, *Through the Dark Portal*, which is coming out in early April. Once that rolls around, things change a lot. Blood Elves and Draenai. Horde Paladins and Alliance Shaman. Cats and dogs living together - mass hysteria!"



tat ZONE

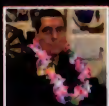
Tit for tat? No! Put those away madam! We want only hard cash!

You can't beat this industry for pumping out mindless shit. Our office fills up with it, so over the past couple of years we've been selling our unwanted gaming paraphernalia under the tag of PCZoners on eBay. However, eBay's stringent rules state that we can't sell alcohol, surveillance equipment, exotic wildlife or human remains. So it is then, that the smiling corpse with a bottle of whisky in its pocket that we were sent to promote *Barbie: Princess Diaries* has proved unshiftable...

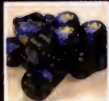
Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk
All proceeds go to charity. Honest.
www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org



THIS MONTH'S TAT



HAWAIIAN FLOWER GARLAND
Sent with *Runaway 2: Dream Of The Turtle*.



BAG OF NURGLE DICE
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STARCRAFT: LIBERTY'S CRUSADE NOVEL
Really quite good actually. Who knew?



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THE TAT BOARD

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	COMPANY OF HEROES HIPFLASK Interesting Tat Zone fact: alcohol containers earn the most moolah.	£39	13
	PRACTICAL PROJECTS FOR YOUR PC We'd hope that this wasn't bought by a PC ZONE reader, but instead by a confused elderly Internet browser. Who knows though...	£5.50	8



Gibs are definitely back in fashion.

YES, WE DO GO SOUTH OF THE RIVER... **HELLGATE: LONDON**

Steve Hogarty desperately searches for an Oddbins in a ruined London...

DEVELOPER Flagship Studios PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE www.hellgatelondon.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

Randomly generated content guarantees replayability



Online mode sounds increasingly good



Graphics are hugely scaleable, from DX8 to DX10



Bosses the size of houses



Not what a lot of people are expecting



BEFORE TODAY, MY last visit to Tottenham Court Road saw me missing the last tube and finding myself happily eating a Bacon Double Cheeseburger on the night bus home. There were definitely no demons, no apocalyptic warzones and very few gaping chasms reaching into the very depths of hell itself. It was definitely an improvement on today's trip to London's electronics-laden High Street, in which a boy called Lil' Timmy asked me to retrieve his prosthetic leg from some hell-spawn he'd encountered.

If there was any doubt that *Hellgate: London* will be dark in both its setting and its offbeat humour, it's lost as soon as you begin playing. The search for the kid's missing appendage took me from Covent Garden tube station, through randomly generated tube tunnels and desolate London streets, on to a final encounter with a 15ft hulking mass of flesh. Exactly why he'd nicked the leg remains a mystery to me, but Lil' Timmy promised he'd give me the stump of wood (an entry-level melee weapon) he was using as a replacement leg if I brought his prosthetic back.

I have to admit, the pedant inside me had a bit of a cry when I discovered that



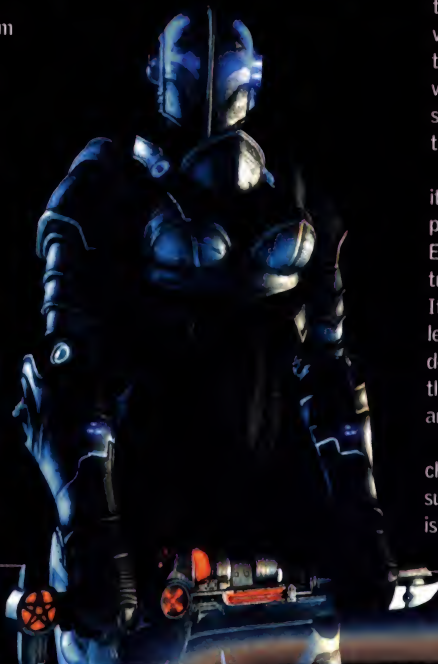
London Underground refused to allow their trademarks be used in the game, meaning familiar logos and posters will be absent in the final release (are you listening mod community?).

COR BLIMEY GUV

However, that's really not what *Hellgate: London* is about. The randomly generated surroundings of the game are built for those who have only a vague familiarity with the city. It's postcard London, it's the Ripper's London, it's red postboxes, waving monarchy and the sort of pea-soup fog which hasn't been seen since the days of Sherlock Holmes.

The fact is, this is London *enough* for it to work perfectly well, and most players won't notice the fact that the East End looks like the West, and the tube stations are the wrong way round. It's brilliant just to be able to fight the legions of the netherworld among derelict boats on the dried riverbed of the Thames, and being able to look up and see wrecked bridges high above.

The formerly unannounced third character faction, I was informed as I successfully gave the child his leg back, is the Hunter. Joining the Cabalist



ETA
SUMMER

THE STORY SO FAR... FLAGSHIP STUDIOS



Birth

Flagship's just a little baby company with wrinkly purple skin and googly eyes.

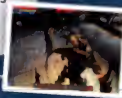
2003



Growth

But it's got the brains of ex-Blizzard peeps in its head. That's a weird baby.

2004



Back to basics

Flagship's Seattle offshoot announce *Mythos* – an RPG with *Diablo* leanings.

2006



Release

This is when *Hellgate* will be out. Where will Flagship go from here?

2007



What about my friends?

What about them?



Nobody's online yet, obviously.

Much like *Guild Wars*, online *HL* will be instance-based, with players spawning in townlike hubs in which they can chat, join guilds, send mail, trade, check out auction houses and talk over VoIP.

Then, once an adventure begins, the group has the world for themselves as each environment is generated just for them. How Flagship intend to take payment for extra content is still undecided. So while it's not going to be the next *WOW*, *Hellgate: London's* multiplayer is no afterthought.



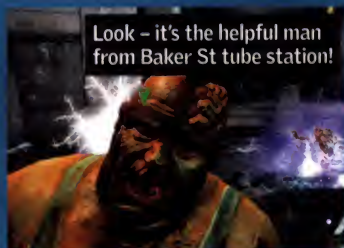
Not a busker in sight.

(demonologist, summoner, transformer) and the Templar (knight, religious fanatic, paladin, barbarian), the Hunter falls into the techno-mage category. The faction is militaristic and full of "spit and gumption" as Ivan Sulic, community manager at Flagship Studios, put it. The Hunter is a weapon-heavy Sam Fisher-type character.

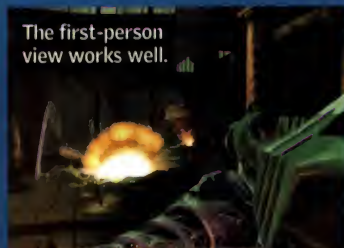
APPLES AND PEARS

My Cabalist character, on the other hand, had already gained a few levels on his travels, and a rummage inside my class-specific skillset rewarded me with several offensive spells, the ability to summon a fire elemental and a very handy spell for transforming into a zombie. This skill left me free to wander the zombie-riddled streets in relative safety, *Shaun Of The Dead*-style. What's more, Simon Pegg fans will be pleased to hear of the subtle inclusion of a cricket bat melee weapon too, perfect for feebly batting away at zombie hordes.

Of course, coming from some of the principal creators of *Diablo* and *Diablo II*, it should come as no surprise that this



Look – it's the helpful man from Baker St tube station!



The first-person view works well.



Weapon and spell configurations can be saved to function keys.

It's postcard London, all red postboxes and pea-soup fog that hasn't been seen since the days of Sherlock Holmes



"Look, you've spilt magic all over the floor."

is a pure action-RPG. The option of an FPS-style perspective belies the sort of hardcore stuff on offer here – at no point is *Hellgate: London* a shooter, and beneath its 3D visuals beats the heart of a true isometric XP-chasing RPG. Discreet green arrows above enemies' heads dictate whether or not an attack will have a chance of connecting, rather than the pointing abilities of your mouse-hand. Such things are handy when you're fighting your way to Covent Garden market in search of a radio transmission emanating from a portal leading to hell.

So could *Hellgate: London* be the RPG of the year? It's certainly ticking all the right boxes, but in the wake of more RPG-lite titles such as *Oblivion*, and highly addictive MMOs such as *WOW* (and perhaps *LOTRO* and *Warhammer Online* too), we have to wonder if, despite its unpretentious, instant-gratification gameplay, it'll make as big an impact as it deserves to. One thing's certain though – we're looking at a new *Diablo*. **PC**



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New	1&1 RSS Creator	✓
New	1&1 Site Checker	✓
New	1&1 SMS Manager	✓
	In2Site Live Dialogue	✓
	Chat Channels	5
	1&1 WebStatistics	✓
	1&1 WebElements	✓
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	1&1 WebDatabase	✓
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	1&1 WebsiteBuilder	25 pgs
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**HOT
SHOTS**

THE CROSSING

DEVELOPER Arkane Studios PUBLISHER TBA WEB www.arkane-studios.com ETA 2008

ARKANE CLAIM THAT *The Crossing* will be the first game to feature 'CrossPlayer' gameplay, which to be honest isn't too difficult when you've made the term up yourself. But what first seemed like a marketing gimmick is quickly becoming something a little more interesting.

If Arkane are to be believed, *The Crossing* will feature some of the most innovative ideas in online gaming we've ever come across. Not, as we first suspected, something to do with people getting very angry, CrossPlay in fact allows real human players to take the place of AI enemies in a single-player-style story mode. These cannon fodder enemies, when not playing a role in somebody else's story, play regular deathmatches between themselves, just waiting for the chance to attack a passing story-mode player.

Sound like a bizarre, high-concept gameplay theory? Perhaps so. Either way, *The Crossing's* going to have a hard time proving itself to sceptics. Luckily for the game, it's a very pretty theory...



The Bigger Picture

1 LE SINGE EST DANS L'ARBRE

The game is set in Paris during several different eras and dimensions, which are all mingling to create a hotbed of interdimensional tomfoolery. Arkane, who recently gave us *Dark Messiah*, are continuing to work with the Source engine too.

2 BENEATH A STEEL GUY

The Templar have arrived from an alternate timeline which happened to overlap with our own. What this means is... well, we're not sure. Arkane are keeping very quiet.

3 EXPENDABLE FRIEND

If you play as the AI-replacing cannon-fodder, the game may offer you the chance to become an Elite player (that is, a single-player hero), and go off on your own adventures.

4 FEELING SKIRMISH?

A typical skirmish map might see soldiers facing off against Parisian thugs. If the next round involves an Elite player, teams may be switched so that everybody's against the Elite.

5 THEY DIDN'T START THE RIOT...

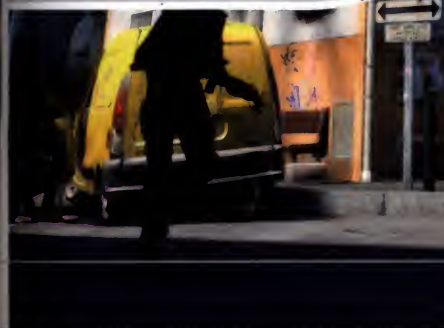
Even though it might look like it's based on the Paris riots, Arkane have been working on *The Crossing* since shortly before the Parisians started tipping things over and breaking windows.

6 TABLE TURNER

If you do become an Elite, you'll have to fight your way out of the level you were just skirmishing in. People who might have been your allies in the previous round will want you dead.

7 GRAPPLE JUICE

We're the superficial sort, so things like grappling hooks really please us. Especially when you can use them to swing from a building top to a street before stabbing somebody in the face.



THE PROFESSIONALS

Uncovering the lies and slander perpetuated by PC gaming

AT SOME STAGE a great deity said 'Let there be light', and then there was Jonathan Cox – head of retail for Honeywell, owners of MK Electric and purveyors of switches and sockets to the stars since 1919. MK have the lion's share of the UK market, so the odds are that a fitting near you is,

right now, embossed with their logo. In short, Jon Cox is a mightily powerful man and when he sees his chosen area of pedantry abused in PC games he becomes righteously angry. Light switches have been continuously misrepresented since the birth of 3D, and it's time to set the record straight.

THIS MONTH: LIGHT SWITCHES

Expert: Jon Cox
Job: Head of retail for Honeywell/MK Electric
Expert pedantry: Sockets and switches in the UK since 1919



QUAKE 4



"Hm. I guess that a lot of this is alien technology so until I get stroggified it's going to be difficult to understand. It does have touch sensitivity rather

than a moving mechanism in it though, which is becoming more popular on Earth and could well be the way forward. I'd expect more security built in to this one though – perhaps a retinal scanner or a pheromone sensor, to make it more secure in what is, after all, an alien military installation dedicated to the eradication of human life. Still, it is green and pretty."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Future shock

THE SIMS 2



"No light switches? If this is supposed to be an accurate representation of 'real life' then I'm out of a job. Then again, not having visible light

switches could become commonplace in the future. Motion sensitive lights that comply with new power regulations and more 'green' energy efficiency could well be the way forward. So maybe the Sims are just way ahead of their time. Or perhaps EA are just rubbish and the light switches have been forgotten because they were too busy churning out expansion packs..."

PCZONE
★★★★★
No switches: no score



SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

"Ah they don't make them like this any more. Seriously: they don't make them like that any more. If this was a pre-WWII facility then fine, but in a temporary modern building set close to a geothermal plant there really is no excuse for not investing in some half-decent switches. More to the point, has that wiring been checked recently? I doubt it somehow. Still – it is a toggle switch, and for once it actually works, so it must come in handy when spotting all those spies sneaking around in the darkness."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Old, but functional



DUKE NUKEM 3D

"It looks like a light switch, but let's be honest: when was the last time you saw the fixing screws above and below the fitting? They're always put at the sides to stop the wiring getting caught when the screws are fitted. Also, I have yet to see a switch that physically goes 'up' and 'down' – that physically goes 'up' and 'down' – there to avoid shorting the thing out and plunging the world into darkness. A sliding switch is simply not practical."

PCZONE
★★☆☆☆
Fixed screws fuxxOred



PREY

"The old 'toggle switch' is seeing a bit of a comeback in games it seems! I do have concerns about this, as it doesn't look like it's IP Rated – meaning it's not waterproof, and anyone with wet hands could get a nasty shock. And anyway, when was the last time you even saw a switch in a public toilet? Even in the home the switch is either outside the room or has a pull-cord so you're less likely to cook yourself when you use it. It may look OK, but it's not safe and it's not in a likely position."

PCZONE
★★★★☆
Water hazard

WINNER: SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

Prey may look the best, but sloppy placement has cost Human Head Studios dear... All rise for Sam Fisher, king of darkness, and old – but functional – light switch design!

ARE YOU A PROFESSIONAL?

PC ZONE is in search of readers with professional and/or anally retentive knowledge in the following fields, and many more:

*Glass bottle manufacture *Torches *Crates *Keys and locks *The Weather
*Vending Machines *The Paranormal *PC Monitors *Nano-technology *Boats

If you want to cast your eye over these or any other PC gaming areas, then email us at TheProfessionals@pczone.co.uk and stick your oar in as far as it'll go.





And a large cleavage too! What will they come up with next?



Barrels and crates to smash? Oh goody!

TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel descends from on high

www.sacred2.com | ETA: Q1 2008

MUCH LIKE THE land of Britain could, in whimsy, be said to be powered by tea energy, *Sacred's* world of Ancaria is powered by T-Energy, which is probably a different sort of energy. In fact, the sequel to 2004's 1.6 million-selling *Sacred* is all about T-Energy, it being the source of all magic and thought (and bunnies and flowers no doubt). Set 2,000 years before the original, *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel* sees six character classes setting out on a wild adventure to prevent T-Energy falling into the wrong hands. Think *Dude, Where's My Car?* except with elves and fairies.

Could it be murmured that the action-RPG is making a comeback? Could you declare at the dinner table that, with the announcement of *Sacred 2* and the imminent arrival of *Hellgate*:

London, the genre that brought us *Diablo* and, er, *Diablo 2* is about to see a revival? Well we certainly wouldn't bet against it. In keeping with current gaming conventions, *Sacred 2* will feature both a light and a dark campaign, which means you'll be making moral decisions (we love those) to further yourself along a path of honour or corruption.

Sacred was a massively popular loot 'em up, and with the sequel launching itself into 3D, adding things like mystic mounts, improved fighting on horseback, hugely improved AI and all the improvements you'd expect from an RPG sequel (such as shinier treasure to find), there's no reason why it can't sell just as well for a second time. 1.6 million players can't be wrong; but can they be right twice in a row?



Dear Steve,

I cannot stand night vision effects in FPS games. I mean, I just spent how much on a graphics card? And I'm using it to make everything look crap, bright and grainy? Dear god man, did the great maker not provide you with the functionality to squint? If I'm playing ANY game, with the possible exception of *Aliens Vs Predator 2*, then I point blank refuse to put on stupid bloody night-vision goggles. It's why they invented a brightness function on your monitor you know...

Will Porter

Dear Will,

I think you've missed the point somewhat. The crucial thing about night vision is that it lets you SEE IN THE DARK. I'm failing to understand what your problem with that is. It looks grainy because that's what it looks like IN REAL LIFE, and it looks bright because that's pretty much the entire point of night vision. What would *Splinter Cell* be without night vision, eh? And does your hatred of night vision stretch to thermal and other enhanced vision modes too?

Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,

Yes, it honestly does. It really irks me as I never quite know when to turn it on or off. I find myself trapped in this cycle of flicking the switch, desperately checking to see if it's still dark outside. I just hate them - they're an icon of boring game design. It's like the developers are shouting, "OMFG lights off LOL!" and thinking they're clever or something. WP

Dear Will

Personally I hate seeing it shoe-horned into non-shooty games like *Dark Messiah*, where it disguises itself as a special magic see-in-the-dark spell. But you have to accept, surely, that games based on covert military action or espionage have to provide you with some sort of night-vision equipment...? SH

Dear Steve,


It's the same wherever it bloody is: spells, military goggles, magic eyeballs - what's the point? If it's dark, it should be dark for decent reasons. Exhibit A: the underground sections of *Half-Life 2: Episode One*. Exhibit B: the *Thief* series. Darkness is our friend, and as gamers we should stop denying it. WP

Dear Will,

'Darkness is our friend'? Is this why you won't admit *Doom 3* was rubbish? SH

Dear Steve,

FFS! Will you just let that one rest? Jesus! WP



I shot your horse with my spaceship.

EMPIRE EARTH III

It's a small world, thinks *Jon Blyth*. But he wouldn't like to conquer it...

DEVELOPER Mad Doc Software PUBLISHER Vivendi Games WEBSITE empireearth.sierra.com PREVIOUSLY IN... N/A

THE LOWDOWN

- Huge boost to graphics ✓
- Less immediately terrifying ✓
- Depth hidden, but still there ✓
- Convincing pagoda explosions ✓
- Will the *Empire Earth* diehards be happy? ✗

EXCITED AND HAPPY. That's the overwhelming impression you get from meeting Mad Doc's lead designer Matthew Nordhaus and producer Maximilien X Klaisner. They might be working on a game so ambitious in scope as to be daunting, but this is their fourth *Empire Earth*-based release and they seem pretty confident.

The *Empire Earth* games, everyone agrees, are solid, epic strategy. Everyone also agrees that they're not for part-timers or the tactically faint-hearted. The first game (the only *Empire Earth* that wasn't developed by Mad Doc) divided human combat into 15 epochs, from scrap-happy cavemen to futuristic mech combat, and featured huge conflicts and five-pronged resource management that kept your attention split between pretty much everywhere.

While developing *EE3*, Mad Doc are bearing in mind the fact that previous acclaim has always been qualified and reserved. For every compliment about the gameplay balance, there'd be a lament about the dated and samey graphics. For every respectful doff to the strategy, there'd be a whimper about information overload and micro-management. They were rewarding games, but the reward was locked in a combination safe. So what have they done to improve the third *Empire Earth*?

"The tendency is for the interface to grow and grow, but we wanted to make the screen a lot cleaner with *EE3*," admits Klaisner. The overview map, from which the turn-based element of the game is conducted, is much like Google Earth. There's vital information at the top and a handful of buttons at the bottom, each opening up a modular set of menus. From these panels, you can access the deep underground vaults of options and settings. Much of the complexity of the previous games is there, but it's not forced down your throat. You'll have to discover and use it to be any good, of course, but it's designed to feel like a discovery rather than a tutorial mission chore.

WISPY, SWIRLY, PRETTY

The graphics have undergone a change too, joining us in the modern day. The cloud system gently circling the globe is subtle and pleasing, and in the RTS element, the old functional graphics have been vastly improved, to the point where a physics engine determines how exploded lumps of building will interact with the terrain. Needless, yes. But way, way cooler than the previous games.

It's all about wowing the newcomers; *Empire Earth* has a loyal fanbase across Europe with many thousands of devotees, but a more

welcoming and pretty game is the way to rope in us shallow idiots in the UK.

Once you've moved your armies around the globe and played your secret special powers, any conflicts on the map are resolved with the game's RTS mode. Foregone conclusions can be skipped with a time-saving auto-resolve feature, so you won't have to mobilise your fleet of space-tanks against a peasant and a tree. What's left on the map at the end of the battle stays there – waiting for next time that terrain becomes a battleground.

CLEAN, CRISP, TASTY

The 15 epochs have now been replaced with a less dogmatic tech tree, and no player will be able to research the whole thing over the course of a game – specialising will be essential. Another way they've smoothed out the freshly-laundered gameplay is by simplifying the resource management – there are no longer five resources and units who rely on a number of them; there's just cash and goods. Artificially simple? Maybe. But certainly more accessible.

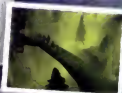
Mention the other problems with the previous games to the Mad Doc boys – for example, the inability of units to choose sensible paths to their destination – and their reaction is open and reassuring. "We're dealing with that,"

ETA
Q4

THE STORY SO FAR...

MAD DOC SOFTWARE

Dungeon Siege 2: Legends Of Aranna
Mad Doc did the expansion pack for the first *Empire Earth*, too.



2003

Empire Earth II
I remember when this was all subjugated natives, as far as the eye could see...



2005

Star Trek: Legacy
A game that made Will Porter roll his mouse around on his forehead in frustration.



2006

Empire Earth III
The *EE* diehards are waiting – you still can't take over the North Pole, though.

2007

It's good to see a sense of humour, hearing a US marine say: "It's time to roll out the red carpet... OF BLOOD!"

The art of decluttering

Mad Doc gets a case of tidy-itis



Those are the only buttons? How can I tell tanks to run, or helicopters to adopt an aggressive posture? Frets be gone; those buttons have been tucked away in tidier modular menus, and mouse shortcuts. Meanwhile, the stylised pagodas are part of Mad Doc's efforts to give each culture a more distinct visual look. What's more, when you blow one of those pagodas up, chunks of the roof bounce off and roll down hillsides. Unparalleled realism in pagoda destruction – that's what science is all about.

Nordhaus and Klaisner tell me.

"We're really chasing the guys on that one. It's a top priority."

New game modes will include World Domination, in which one player will act as the server, where up to eight players can make their moves on the world map individually. Then they organise when to play the RTS battles that follow in their own time. It's similar in theory to the Pitboss server for *Civ IV*, or playing chess by mail with someone in Greece. Games of *EE3* could range from a 'quick' few hours to an ongoing war taking weeks.

For all the effort spent on tech trees, balance and physics engines, it's good to see Mad Doc are putting in a sense of humour. Irritating vocal responses to basic commands are the bane of RTS games, but hearing a US marine say, "It's time to roll out the red carpet... OF BLOOD!" is encouraging.

One glitch in the physics engine, meanwhile, caused debris to start orbiting the globe like an asteroid belt. The response from the developers was indecision as to whether they should fix the bug or start adding space colonies to the game. They love their game, and it shows. It'll be our turn to love it – or pull faces over its shoulder while we hug it – by the end of the year. **PCZ**



UPFRONT **OI! WHAT'S YOUR GAME?**



BONDE

WHAT'S YOUR GAME?

Jon Blyth slips on his BuddyCam to look through the eyes of *GRAW2*'s designer Lars Bonde...

Who are ya?

GRIN

NAME Lars Bonde

DEVELOPER

Grin Software

POSITION

Game designer

AGE 30

GAMES WORKED

ON BEFORE First

major production

FAVOURITE GAME *Ghost Recon*



Q Did you feel the first *GRAW* suffered because people didn't realise it wasn't just a 360 port?

A "Maybe. They could have decided to make a port for the first game, but we felt it was important to give the PC player a different experience – with different locations and different gameplay. Getting that across was a matter of communication. I talk with a lot of communities from different countries, and I'm a dedicated player of these games myself. I meet a lot of people who tell me they appreciate the unique PC version, but a lot of people who thought it was just a port. There's a superficially similar look, so if you don't end up playing both versions, it's easy to miss the differences."

Some people had complaints about the AI of the first game. What were they, and how are you dealing with them?

"Well, first we needed a new way to create paths for the AI to use. We made sure that we had a bunch of cover-points for the AI to use, and reloaded the AI to make sure they'd utilise all of that. In the first game, they'd see a path, and if there was anything in the way, they'd just move around it. Now they really know their way around the universe; they see the points between themselves and their goal."

"Assault and Recon modes are designed to address some of the

issues, too; every command you give will be treated differently, depending on what mode your squad are in. Plus, you have the BuddyCam with the CrossCom 2.0, which gives you far more direct access to the paths of your squad. You won't be just using the tactical map to plan their paths."

***GRAW* was set solely in Mexico City. What new locations can we expect?**

"First, the big difference is that the threat has moved – it's not just on the Mexican side of the border, it's getting closer to the US. Those are different environments. It's no longer just urban environments either – we've got downtown as well as out-of-town rural areas."

I've met Bo Andersson (Grin's CEO with two years military experience) before – what other military experience did you have in making *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter 2*?

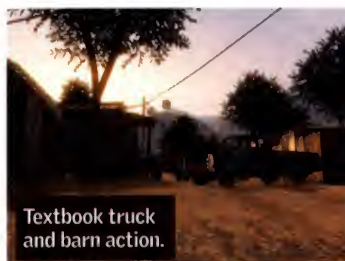
"The atmosphere we have at Grin is really dedicated in this way. Take one of our weapons designers: he's really an ex-military guy, and he makes these exceptional models – he really cares about this stuff. And we've got Bo, as well as other ex-military people too. (Grin's first software releases were military simulators.)"

"We worked quite closely with the US military too, to get some insight into the latest technology and what would be realistic. The latest weapons, the digital camo and so on. These are people who know how it all works, and how people would actually move with all this equipment on."



"One more look at you... And I know it's gonna be..."

"We worked quite closely with the US military too, to get some insight into the latest technology..."



Textbook truck and barn action.



Another successful meeting of tank-haters.

The new multiplayer for *GRAW2* sounds interesting – what have you done there?

"The Recon vs Assault multiplayer is special to *Advanced Warfighter 2*. It takes the two play modes in the single-player game and splits them into opposing teams. You have the Mexican assault team, whose speciality is their strong firepower – grenades, sub-machine guns, plus they have unlimited supplies and unlimited respawn. On the other side you have the US Recon team, who have access to all the nice features you get in the single-player. They can also tag enemies so they appear on their team-mate's display, plus

they get the CrossCom and stealthy weapons too. But they don't respawn; if they die, they can only help by tagging enemies from their BuddyCam."

So this is your first game... How are you finding it?

"It's a great experience and they're a great bunch of guys. I really like the idea that people can be passionate about games and be a part of the things they love. Like me – I played *Ghost Recon* massively when it came out and became part of the community. Now, years later I'm here, a part of the *Advanced Warfighter 2* team. It's amazing." **PCZ**

"Let's just stay here. I'm comfy."



LARS BONDE

Where he turns for inspiration...



Batman: A Batman lover, Lars reckons the latest film of the caped crusader is the best by far.



Anthony And The Johnsons: Not exactly music to bomb to, but it's unique and Lars loves it.



Online communities: A member of many online communities, he loved combat.net in particular.

**COMING
SOON...**

LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

"Get bored of Tolkien? I'd Angmar head in shame," laughs a jolly *Will Porter*

DEVELOPER Turbine PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE lotro.turbine.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 178

THE LOWDOWN

- Lovingly recreated hills and dales of Middle-earth ✓
- Plonks you right next to the story bits ✓
- Cool Tolkien-centric races and classes ✓
- Intriguing Monster Play mode ✓
- You'll miss your pals in Azeroth ✗

**ETA
SPRING**

SO I'VE PLAYED on the beta, I've chatted with the developers a few times, I've seen the films and I've had my junior-school English teacher read bits of *The Hobbit* out with a raspy voice and exaggerated hand gestures. But I still don't know what Angmar is, and I'm still not sure why it's got shadows. "That's where the Witch King rises from, the guy who leads the Nazgul," explains Codemasters' Ed Blincoe while comedically slapping his forehead. "That's where he started from – he was doing Sauron's work from Angmar for quite a long time."

Okay, so that's me corrected – though it's perhaps not a huge lapse of Tolkien knowledge on my part, since Angmar is never delved into in any detail in either book or film. Turbine, then, have had the opportunity to use their own imaginations as well as slavishly converting words to worlds from the original texts – seeing as this is an MMO licensed from the books rather than Peter Jackson's efforts. Staying true to print Tolkien-ana and

avoiding the influence of the movies must be pretty tough though surely?

"It isn't that difficult, in fact it's easier," Blincoe tells me. "The movies are very linear, whereas the books themselves are fairly open – certainly more open to interpretation." True, but even the most hardened of monster-spotters will have it in mind that the Turbine Cave Troll looks more than a little bit like the celluloid one.

MORE, MORE, MORE!

The initial release of *LOTRO* covers spots like Bree, The Shire, Barrow Downs, Angmar and Rivendell. Turbine are promising that new content will be pumped in every 6-12 weeks, with expansion packs covering the likes of Gondor, Rohan and Mordor surfacing every nine months or so.

One thing that really sets *LOTRO* apart from its *Warhammer* and *Warcraft* rivals though, is its PvP – or apparent lack thereof. "If you're a hero of Middle-earth, then you shouldn't really be fighting another hero of Middle-earth," explains Blincoe. "Plus, orcs really don't have a

social life, and they wouldn't go about questing either. So we had to think of a different way of doing it."

Enter Monster Play – the feature that lets you play as the opposition without having an elf pal-up with a Uruk-hai to kill a field of coneys. Essentially, you'll be able to sit in the bad boots of Sauron's minions parallel to your own character – you won't be able to level-up, but there will be quests to do and 'monster points' to earn, which then can be spent on perks for your main character – or indeed on playing as bigger varieties of monster.

But when the time comes, which race and class should we be? Dwarf, elf, hobbit or human? Captain, burglar, champion, lore-master, minstrel, hunter or guardian?

"We've now come to a point where every character is fun to play," ruminates Blincoe. "I'm working my way through as a Man Burglar at the moment, which sounds rather rude, but when it goes live I'll be playing as a Dwarf Guardian as I just love the way he roars." Roaring dwarves and man burglars eh? Can't wait. **PC2**

WHY YOU SHOULD BE EXCITED...

MADE FOR WALKING

Mounts won't be available in *Shadows Of Angmar*, but they'll probably be introduced come the Rohan expansion. So get ready for some hefty strolling...

HARD CRAFT

As a weaponsmith, you too can make lovely swords like this – unless you're otherwise engaged as a metalsmith, leatherworker, forester, scholar, cook, prospector, woodworker or jeweller. No tinkers, tailors, soldiers or spies, mind.

PLAY THE BETA NOW!
LOG ON TO
WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK



HAPPY WHEN IT TRAINS

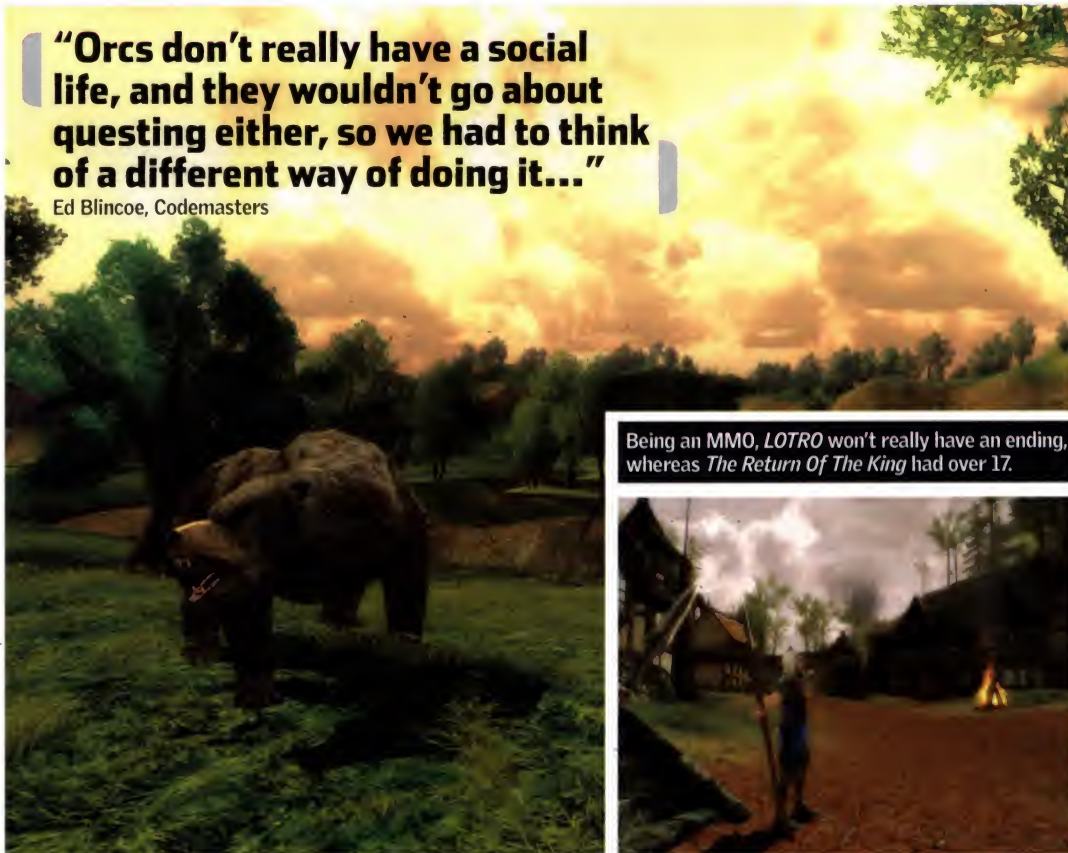
Much like in *WOW*, every two levels you go up more talents will be unlocked – all you have to do is find a trainer in a town to do the business and shazam! Better monster-mashing.

JOLLY GOOD FELLOWS(HIP)

Like Turbine's *D&D Online: Stormreach*, much of the content will be built with groups (or 'fellowships') in mind, with different roles for different classes in each. Hooray for fellowships!


"Orcs don't really have a social life, and they wouldn't go about questing either, so we had to think of a different way of doing it..."

Ed Blincoe, Codemasters




Being an MMO, *LOTRO* won't really have an ending, whereas *The Return Of The King* had over 17.





The pilotable Necris Fury craft. Evil.



Warning: Bio-Rifle may cause hair loss.

NEW NAME, SAME MAIM...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

Jamie Sefton thrashes the FPS sequel "from the makers of *Gears Of War*"

DEVELOPER Epic Games PUBLISHER Midway WEBSITE www.epicgames.com PREVIOUSLY IN... 176

THE LOWDOWN

Recently renamed sequel to one of the all-time classic FPS franchises



Incredible Unreal Engine 3 visuals



Includes brand-new vehicles, weapons, maps and multiplayer modes



Branching single-player campaign mode



Still no confirmed 2007 release date



IT'S MY MOMENT of glory. A fellow Blue Team player holding the stolen red flag is desperately hoverboarding back to base, pursued relentlessly by two nasty red types. I spot the trouble, hijack a Necris Viper bike and mow both of the shocked foes down from behind, allowing my team-mate to plant the flag triumphantly and win the round. A brief laugh and acknowledgement from my team-mates, and then I'm back in the action. I sat down to play *Unreal Tournament III* eight-player LAN Capture The Flag an hour ago and haven't moved since, my eyes fixed unblinkingly on the dazzling images, hands dancing over the mouse and keyboard, drool glistening and collecting in the corner of my mouth...

Unreal Tournament III is the new confirmed name for Epic's next instalment of the classic sci-fi shooter that first exploded its first headshot gibbs back in 1999. I've always personally preferred *UT*'s glorious colourful sci-fi/fantasy universe with imaginative alternative fire options to *Quake*'s rather drab red/brown decor and straight-down-the-line weapons, but apart from the supreme vehicle additions in *UT2004*, I never felt the sequels had managed to achieve the heights of the magnificent original. That is, until now. While there's obviously still tons of work for Epic to undertake, including thorough

balancing and playtesting, I can confidently say that *Unreal Tournament III* is on course to be the best of the entire series. Why? Read on...

CHINA CRISIS

The CTF map I played is called Corruption – a gorgeously rendered Far Eastern environment, complete with golden lion sculptures, orange lanterns, water features, rolling hills, ornate wooden temples and, erm, large robotic tentacles pumping poisonous goop into the Earth's crust. Here, the human Izanagi Corporation are attempting a last-ditch effort to repel the evil Necris Black Legion alien invaders who are slowly turning the idyllic rural setting into a poisoned, otherworldly nightmare.

Beginning on the goody-goody Blue team, I storm straight into a round of CTF and attempt to make it to the enemy temple at the opposite end of the map, grab their banner and return it to base without getting gibbed. Tricky, when you start to appreciate the huge

array of weapons that both teams have at their disposal – the classic *UT* gib-splattering collection of Flak Cannon, Rocket Launcher, Shock Rifle and Bio-Rifle joined by others including the Stinger and Link Gun. All feel substantial, with detailed animated parts on-screen, and each has alternative fire modes for varying kills – the Rocket Launcher, for example, again has the ability to launch multiple

ETA
**WHEN
IT'S DONE**

THE STORY SO FAR...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT



Headshot!

Unreal Tournament creates a brutal multiplayer sport to rival *Quake III: Arena*.

1999

Double kill!

UT2003 hits the shelves with improved graphics, adrenalin pills and a few vehicles.

2002



Killing spree!

UT2004 is released with better use of vehicles and new multiplayer modes.

2003



Rampage!

UT2007 becomes *UT3*, with incredible graphics and a new solo story mode.

2007

Revenge story

First *Unreal Tournament III* single-player details!



"The thing we saw with *UT2004* was that less than 50% of people were going online, and we felt that we weren't doing a service to those people - that the single-player wasn't worth buying," says lead producer Jeff Morris. Epic really feel that they've neglected the single-player element in the past and so have recruited Susan O'Connor, the writer for *Gears Of War* and also the forthcoming *BioShock* for Irrational Games.

So what's the storyline about? "*UT3* is basically a revenge story, one we think matches well with our sci-fi, OTT violence kind of thing," continues Morris. "It's you getting revenge for a wrong that's been done to you, and then this Necris invasion happens. We have this single-player branching campaign which is really cool."

"You'll be fighting for one mercenary corporation against another, then you'll go to that other corporation because they'll help you get revenge quicker than your old one. The shifting allegiances felt right, and your characters have personalities now - in the single-player game you're definitely a character, you don't just pick your character from a list - you're one dude. In multiplayer you can pick whoever you want, but having the one central character now allows us to give them personality and interaction with their team-mates that we didn't have before."

projectiles or deadly bouncing grenades, simply by holding the right mouse-button until the on-screen receptacle changes to the mode you require.

MARS ATTACKS

One problem in *UT2004* was getting around the larger levels quickly without a vehicle, an issue that's been neatly solved by the Hoverboard. Accessible at all times, this device can be used to grapple onto faster-moving vehicles or even pull yourself into them, as well as various Tony Hawk-style tricks. However, the highlight of this first playtest was the vehicle combat, and although a few of the aerial craft weren't available (including the tentacled and menacing Necris Fury shown opposite), *UT3* was still a blast. Highlights from the opposing Axon team include the two-person Hellbender truck that launches lethal sky mines, Goliath tank for pounding enemy positions into dust, and extremely nimble Scorpion fast car that unleashes bouncing blue balls of death, reminiscent

of the weaponry of the clumsy CG twats the Gungans in *Star Wars: Ep 1*.

Yet nothing can prepare you for the fun you can have with the awesome Necris Dark Walker, a *War Of The Worlds*-style killer tripod with snaking legs, a beam weapon that destroys all in its path and an extremely cool sonic blast reminiscent of the "Ullah" from HG Wells' classic novel. In fact, it's so good, it's in danger of dominating vehicle-based multiplayer in *UT3* as players inevitably flock to the evil Reds for the chance to climb in the cockpit and unleash Martian-inspired devastation.

So the big question - when will *UT3* be released? There are rumblings of a multiplayer demo release in autumn to allow Epic to fully test the online capabilities a few months before release Christmas 2007, but for Epic's lead producer Jeff Morris, *UT3* will only be released when it's completely finished: "We think we're going to be done by the end of this year, but we're not going to ship it if it isn't ready. One of the reasons for the name change is that we wouldn't want to sell a game called *UT2007* in 2008!"

PRINCE OF DARKNESS

PC ZONE talk to Clive Barker as he plots devilish ways to raise new hell in gaming...

SADOMASOCHISTIC CENOBITES, cannibalism, hooks in flesh, skin-stealing... "We've got sights to show you," grinned Pinhead in seminal horror flick *Hellraiser* – and didn't he just? However, Clive Barker himself has shown us so much more – in his books, his films, his soft toy range and in his games. Well, in *Clive Barker's Undying* anyway – the others haven't been very good. But now he's back with *Clive Barker's Jericho*, a project he's steering all the way from conception – rather than being invited on-board as he was with the character and storywork he performed on *Undying* back in 2001.

Originally from Liverpool and now a happy resident of Los Angeles, there's no argument that Barker is the perennial king of horror – and the merchant of tales about a million times more disturbing than that King chap could come up with in his darkest moments. From the *Books Of Blood* – an abridged version of which is free with this issue of *PC ZONE* – to *Candyman* and *Nightbreed*, the man's a legend. Hello Clive!

THE STORY SO FAR...

CLIVE BARKER GAMES

FMV spree

An interactive movie and game tie-in with the *Nightbreed* film. They aren't very good.



1990

Haunted house

Undying is released with Clive's input. It's a stunning game, but no bugger plays it.



2001

False start

Demonik, a game where you play a hellish villain, is announced then cancelled the next year.



2005

Horn for Jericho

The hype train begins for *Jericho*. Which so far looks bloody brilliant, if a bit gruesome.

2006



Hectic...



Scary...



Shocking...



...And containing lots and lots of shooting.

Q Can you tell us why you're excited about the *Jericho* game?

A "I'm excited about the game because the story's fresh, and because with it we have a greater chance of scaring the shit out of players around the world. I'd been carrying the idea of *Jericho* around in my head before I'd even talked to anyone about the project, so I feel very close to it. I'd hope people to think of *Jericho* the way I thought of – let's say *Alien* – when that movie was about to come out. Teased with glimpses but never given the whole monstrous truth until the story was told on the screen. *Jericho* should be the same – unique and terrifying."

Do your games tie in with your books?
Is there an overall coherent universe to your writing that gamers should be made aware of?

"No, my games don't tie up with my books – at least, so far. *Jericho* is the first games project I've been connected with which I really feel might be explored in novels and comic-books. I have a huge passion for comic-books! I've liked the *Jericho* idea since it first came into my head because it comes up two of my passions: history

and horror. Our protagonists' journey through slices of other times in the game, their progress bringing them steadily closer to the Great Adversary who sits at the centre of this Labyrinth of Time."

Your books can end with apocalyptic drama; the unravelling of reality and the bleeding of worlds into each other – how will the climax of *Jericho* compare?

"The climaxes of my books do indeed end with apocalyptic events and unravelling realities. There should be a taste of that same sublime destructiveness in *Jericho*. Of course, the ending depends entirely on how you play the game, but one way or the other you'll get to see fire and blood."

There's some pretty horrific stuff in *Jericho* – is there anything you'd consider too violent to go into the game?

"There is some intense and gory material in *Jericho*, but I've always believed that one of the tasks a maker of horror stories in any medium has is to take his or her audience into areas of taboo; places where they wouldn't have dared to venture had the game not obliged them to trespass on treacherous

ground. And in so trespassing, inviting the wrath of some creature that they've never encountered before."

How are the *Jericho* squads formed and bound together? Are you trying to say anything by setting it in the modern-day Middle East?

"There's no doubt that if *Jericho* is liked by players, we'll take our psychic squad out on other adventures (assuming, of course, any of them survive.) The human appetite for mystery and terror has never waned even when, as now, the world is filled with very real terrors. Maybe that's the connection. Maybe we seek out games and stories that allow us a measure of control over the horrors of the invented world: a control which we do not have, regrettably, in the real world."

Do you miss the UK at all now that you're based in sunny LA?

"I miss many of the friends I made in my home city of Liverpool, and later the colleagues I worked with making the first *Hellraiser* in London. I miss rain. I miss autumn (but not winter). I miss thunderstorms, which are incredibly rare in Los Angeles. But I'm sitting

here, towards the end of January, with a clear blue sky outside and the palm trees swaying as the balmy Santa Ana winds blow. What's not to like?"

Dogs or cats?

"Both cats and dogs. And white rats, huge koi and geckos that we buy from the pet store and set free in the house so that they can make homes in the drapery. Plus my parrots, Malingo and Smokey, and my beloved Gonzo, the cockatiel I hand-raised. I could go on. Animals are blissful evidence that the creator wants us to have fun." **PCZ**

Undead child wants huggles!



ALL FALL DOWN...

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICO

Will Porter reports on yet another disturbance in the Middle East. And this time sending soldiers in seems like a good idea...

DEVELOPER Mercury Steam PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE www.codemasters.com/jericho PREVIOUSLY IN... 177

THE LOWDOWN

As brought to you by Mr *Hellraiser* himself



Really, really horrid



Intriguing 'time slices' level structure



Hideous creature design



Can't tell how good the combat is yet



ETA
SEPT

THERE'S NO I in team. Well, there used to be – but you died. It was really quite sad. You were there one moment, standing in a lost city packed with demons and screaming at the top of your lungs, and then you were dead. Just another rugged action hero vastly experienced in supernatural warfare popping his cork at the hands of something horrible: Devin Ross, gone but not forgotten.

But wait! Much like Patrick Swayze in *Ghost*, you've come back from the very brink of death! Although there'll be no clay-sex tomfoolery for you, oh no. In *Jericho*, it's all about leaping between the minds of your military cohorts, combining their prodigious paranormal powers and turning the poor denizens of Al-Khali into a bloody pulp.

Al-Khali itself seems OK on the surface – just another everyday Middle-Eastern city really – but its town planners seemingly had even less sense than the fools behind Welwyn Garden City. I mean, they've only gone and bloody built it on the exact spot that every few thousand years pure evil

forces itself through a temporal rift and sits upon the face of the earth. Dolts.

CITY OF THE DAMNED

Triggered by blackspots of history – the gluttony of the Roman Empire, the mass-killings of The Crusades and the warfare and genocide enacted by Germany's National Socialist party – every time this terrifying temporal sandstorm whips up around the city, a different version of it has been taken back into the dimension from whence it came, occupants and all.

Left there for aeons, the swallowed-up soldiers have had a lot of time to reconstruct their fleshy bits and brain chemistry, and it's their layers of history you must traverse as your team makes its way to the heart of its evil.

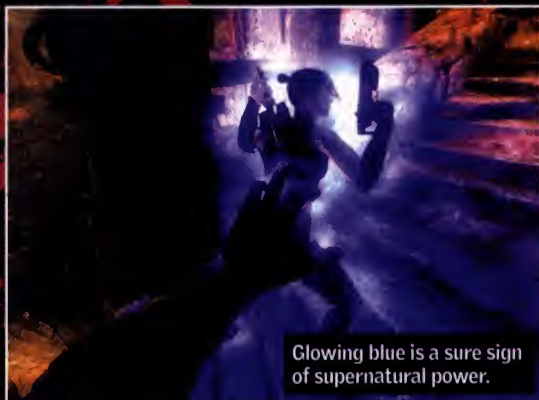
From an Al-Khali bombed and battered by the ravages of WWII, through to the 'Arabian Nights' confines known by the medieval knights you see displayed here and the heady days of Roman occupation, *Jericho* is as much

an adventure in archaeology as it is piles of dead bodies that have achieved consciousness.

The first chaps to open the rift between dimensions through their nastiness, meanwhile, were the Sumerians – who sit at the centre of this bloody maze and who, Wikipedia informs me, 'were brought fully formed to the city of Eridu by their god Enki or by Abgallu the Oannes of Berossus'. What they probably didn't believe was that it's all their fault that The Box, or more specifically 'The Pyxis' – the undying corrupted dimension inhabited by the source of all evil, got opened in the first place. Bloody Sumerians... Typical.

BARK AT THE MOON

Jericho is being developed by Mercury Steam, the Spaniards who last brought the 'couldn't be more different if it tried' *American McGee's Scrapland* to our screens. A quick swap from a goatee-ed ex-*Doom* developer as muse to a man with a mind of absolute darkness, and



Glowing blue is a sure sign of supernatural power.



He gets close, he explodes... You die.



Clive the skeleton owned a corridor. It wasn't much, but it was his.

they and their self-developed engine are somewhere a little more menacing than a cheery robot land.

The concept of *Jericho* came from Barker himself, whose dark thoughts were snapped up by Codemasters, who then happened to know that the technology Mercury Steam were tinkering with was running deep with blood. Specifically particle-based blood that can gush out of exposed wounds, dissipate in clouds of red in high-intensity collisions. The engine's speciality in shiny body goo, murky lighting, life-like environment textures and overtly stylised, yet still somewhat real creatures, fit the bill precisely.

And so, with Barker's aid, soon came the mad and the

***Jericho* is as much an adventure in archaeology as it is piles of dead bodies that have achieved consciousness...**

"Leave my flesh alone you sod!"



Meet The Team

They might have had difficult schooldays, but now watch them bloom...

SGT FRANK DELGADO

Role: Pyromancer

Function: Frank's right hand is actually Ababanili – an entity comprised entirely from flame who's kept in an airtight container. In real life this wouldn't happen, due to science being what it is, but when he gets loose you won't care.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: Frank has been the subject of inappropriate wanking gags since his early teens.

grotesque: the *Jericho* meanies, including both flying creatures whose habit it is to eviscerate their prey and use their flesh to pad out their wings; and vast creatures made from mangled, melded corpses that you'll have to climb up and over before you destroy them.

COME FLY WITH ME

Your team aren't exactly everyday joes either – each with their own supernatural forte and armaments that you can use as you leap between them (see 'Meet The Team', right). Abigail Black, for example, was born with the ability to steer bullets with her telekinesis, and Billie Church can create a mist of her own blood that freezes anything that wanders through it.

Exactly how these super-soldiers discovered their powers is up for question, but they certainly come in handy when trapped in the bowels of a hell dimension. What's more, seeing as you're more than a little spectral, you can link brains together – meaning that you'll be sniping with the bullet-telekinesis lady, but can tap into her squad-mates 'seer' powers, letting you see through walls. So, a nasty fleshy skeleton man with all his guts hanging out may well be hiding behind a wall in the crafty belief that he's safe – but you'll still be able to direct a bullet or two around corners to get him...

SIX IS A CROWD

With six living characters engaged in the brawl, you'd think that such pairings would be hard to come by in the chaos – but the game isn't quite structured like that. True, it'll work so that when you're in wider areas you'll often have the full complement of the *Jericho* squad, but it'll also conveniently separate the team through various cataclysms as you move through the game. With three or so characters, levels will become tighter and more

CPL SIMONE COLE

Role: Reality Hacker

Function: A vastly intelligent mathematician and computer programmer, and quite hot with an assault rifle, Cole comes equipped with a mobile computer that's just so damned clever it can create anchors in time and space. Although you may know them as savepoints. Can also (gasp!) speed up and slow down time.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: Cruelly known as 'F6' ever since the emergence of the quicksave.

LT ABIGAIL BLACK

Role: Telekinetic

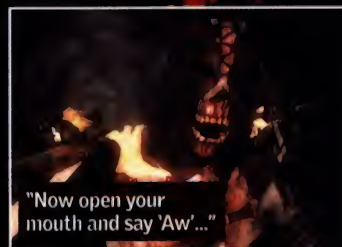
Function: When sniping can bend the flight of bullets into her fleshy targets, but can also redirect anything chucked at her or her buddies through her remarkable gravity-defying powers. It hurts her though and (honestly) causes her to bleed from the ears, nose and mouth if she does it too much.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: Once had a nosebleed during PE, and was accused of cheating at netball. When in fact, she was just trying really hard.





The smiles on their faces probably mean they love their mums...



"Now open your mouth and say 'Aw'..."

CPT XAVIER JONES

Role: Seer

Function: Being bald, gifted with second sight and called Xavier, the only surprise is that Cpt Jones isn't in a wheelchair or played by Patrick Stewart. Nevertheless, he can see glimpses of the past and future, while being able to see things that the average mortal eye cannot.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: Realised the non-existence of Father Christmas all too early.

FATHER PAUL RAWLINGS

Role: Exorcist

Function: The supernatural brains of the bunch, his Right Royal Reverend Rawlings has seen action in both Vietnam and Iraq. Knows tons about magic, consecration and exorcism, and still keeps all his chips with Big J up there in heaven.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: As a child, Rawling's dog collar was once, for several months, replaced with a giant white cone to prevent him from licking his own testicles. The memory still rankles.

specialised – playing to the various abilities of your cohorts. Squad combat will work with you delivering context-sensitive orders, or with the gang just following your lead – while Rawlings the exorcist preacherman will be able to heal those brought down by the evil if they're lying within his line of sight.

Don't worry about a particular lack of bullets though – as one of your cohorts has a fire-demon living in a containment chamber on his arm, it's fair to say that the firepower you're going in with is relatively mighty.

SUICIDE IS DANGEROUS

But what evil lurks? What horrors await? What residue is bobbing in the U-bend of the damned? You'll regularly come across cultists who are essentially the Al-Khali People's Front Crack Suicide Squad, and who can't wait to kill themselves in horrible ways when you get near. All is not lost for them, however, since they're invariably reborn as hideous creatures far more inclined to rip your limbs apart.

Others, meanwhile, have used their time away from the world to infect themselves with thousands of different diseases simultaneously – and thanks to a handy glistening hook instead of a right hand, then run up to your squad, rip themselves open and let their pus and diseased gases do their dirty work.

Solely in the crusader areas of Al-Khali, meanwhile, will be child knights – originally used as a weapon in the Middle Ages since it was thought that their purity and innocence would prove undefeatable on the battlefield. These days, however, they fly around in spectral form – through walls and ceilings – floating around at close range before becoming corporeal and lashing out with the unnaturally large veins they have instead of arms, pumped with corrupted blood.

With a cinematic edge, interactive cut-scenes and enough disturbing imagery to cause an entire collective noun of nuns to collapse and die, there's much to get excited about with *Jericho*. Whether the gameplay manages to match the concept remains to be seen, but in a year where squad combat is in the minority shooter-wise, it's a leading light in horror gaming and the most disgusting thing we've ever covered. Ever. Over to you Mr Barker... **PC7**

SGT 'BILLIE' CHURCH

Role: Blood Ward

Function: Extremely able melee character who, reluctantly, carries a machine gun as well as a samurai sword. She draws her own blood with a dagger and enchants various things and draws scary sigils.

Insecurities stemming from childhood: Tragically nicknamed after Billie 'Billie' Piper. Billie discovered her talent after one too many of her classmates asked her why "she was playing that song so loud".



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PCZONE

REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

World Of Warcraft

I HAVEN'T FREQUENTED that many drug-infested areas, I've never been in a crack house and I certainly haven't had the dubious honour of smoking the substance. Right now though, I know what it must feel like to live in a crack den.

It's 12.55pm and looking about the office, I can see the signs of anticipation among the vacant stares and pallid complexions of those I've dubbed 'users'. They're starting to get restless, checking their watches – one's even dribbling slightly at the corner of his mouth. One o'clock strikes and all over the office, machines whir to life as work materials are thrown aside. Yes, I work in an office of WOW addicts.

But while the release of *The Burning Crusade* (page 70) has boosted their ranks even further and allowed the hardcore few to get even more fellow journos hooked, I won't be trying it. No, having kicked my MMO habit long ago, I will resist and despite taking the occasional consequence-free pull on *Guild Wars*, I intend to keep my body and mind pretty much MMO-free. Remember kids, just say no.

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...



HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

56

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

Is it a blast or merely a shadow of its former self?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)

The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)

Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns ZONE's head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)

Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an Internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK

See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC Class System

Not all games are created equal, so how do you know if your PC's up to the job? Using real science, we've graded your system from 1-5. Match it with the icon on each review to see if your PC will play the game. We review all games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D.

	1	2	3	4	5
CPU	1.2GHz	1.8GHz	2.4GHz	3.0GHz	3.8GHz
RAM	64MB	256MB	512MB	1GB	2GB
Video	32MB	64MB	128MB	256MB	512MB

ALSO REVIEWED

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- 66 TRACKMANIA UNITED
- 68 THE MARK
- 68 AGATHA CHRISTIE: MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS
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STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

Will Porter meets and greets the shooter that came in from the cold

DEVELOPER

GSC Game World

PUBLISHER THQ

WEBSITE

www.stalker-game.com

ETA March 23

PRICE £34.99



HERE'S A GOOD analogy. At first, playing *STALKER* feels like driving someone else's car. It may look much like the one you're used to, but that won't stop you turning off a roundabout every now and then with your windscreen wipers going and your boot swinging open in your desperate attempts to find the indicators. *STALKER* is different in style and execution from pretty much any shooter you've played. From one angle it's defiantly (and brilliantly) different, and from another it's wilfully obtuse and reluctant to inform you exactly how to dip the headlights.

I've been exploring the exclusion zone for several days now and have thoroughly enjoyed myself – more so than I have done in quite a while in fact – but before we enter the main body of the review, I need you to be aware of one vital piece of information. Sitting comfortably? Right.

If you choose to buy *STALKER*, you need to be aware that this is not a super-silky Hollywood production – there are rough edges and it's not tied up with a pink frilly bow. However... Despite this, despite the epic wait and despite the amount of scissoring that's obviously gone on, we've still ended up with an excellent shooter. With that in mind, let's delve deeper.

FALLOUT BOY

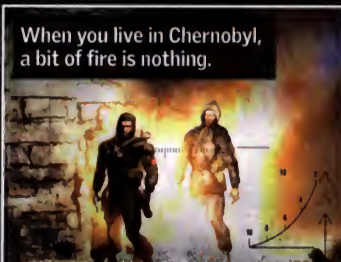
It begins with you, a token FPS amnesiac, waking up knowing only that you want a chap called Strelok dead. You're not just anywhere either – you're in a living, breathing representation of the forbidden zone that lies around the more infamous reactor at Chernobyl. A trader who lives in a hole asks you to do some odd jobs for him, including tracking down a few people, and everything progresses from there. First stop is a village full of guttural men, and then you're out into the wastes.

The game isn't endlessly free-roaming à la *Oblivion*, but instead is divided into ten or so separate levels with loading zones in between. The general direction of travel is

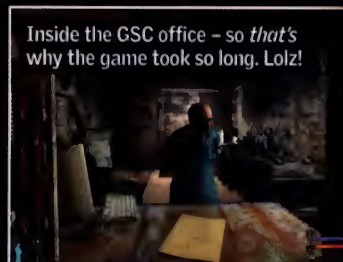
Radiation gives everything a lovely sepia glow.



When you live in Chernobyl, a bit of fire is nothing.



Inside the GSC office – so *that's* why the game took so long. Lolz!



north, as the storyline urges you further and further towards the Chernobyl reactor, and leads you on a merry dance through underground laboratories, undead Stalker-infested swamps and many and varied army bunkers. As you move from map to map there'll normally be things kicking off that you can help out with too – defending a barricade from a rival faction's onslaught perhaps, or protecting a warehouse full of friendly Stalkers from the military.

Finally, if you can't be arsed with the scripted stuff, certain missions ask you to do semi-random stuff like clearing out warehouses and mutant nests or seeking out rare radioactive artefacts that, rather than rendering you sterile and making your

hair fall out, offer a variety of RPG-lite upgrades. All around you, meanwhile, is what developers GSC Game World call 'A-Life' – a landscape teeming with packs of creatures and humans who roam and behave according to their own whims (whims that generally involve killing each other or maybe running away).

Low-powered weapons and general insecurity about exactly what you're supposed to be doing plague your opening hours, but after a little while you realise that the action is very much a blend of *Far Cry* and *Deus Ex*. The inventory system and 'any which way you can' mentality of JC Denton merges with the unpredictable, sniper-centric and really bloody difficult

AT A GLANCE...

Long awaited semi-freeform shooter based around the irradiated wastelands of Chernobyl. But can it match its epic development time?

System requirements

4

HOW IT STACKS

DEUS EX 94%

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL 85%

BOILING POINT 70%



A 'keep out' sign would have sufficed.



Friendly AI will often lend a hand.



Lots of guns, no women.



The unwieldy map.

stylings of Jack Carver, making for some excellent action that gives you moments of extreme self-congratulation as you pull off swift headshots hither and thither. The need to salvage bullets and med-packs from your deceased foes' backpacks, meanwhile, adds a subdued survival element that's completely lacking in most modern-day mainstream shooters.

The setting too, is brilliantly weird and stunning in its design. From the ominous click of your Geiger counter, to absurdly stunted and warped trees with radioactive fuzz hanging from their branches, to an otherworldly yellow bleaching effect that consumes your screen in heavily radiated areas – you've honestly never seen anything quite like it. The game world is without a doubt the best thing about the game, and is hands-down



The game took so long to develop, some of the NPCs died of old age.



A quick lob of a bolt reveals anomalies. Toasty!



Watching the AI fighting is great fun.



Hiding behind a giant teaspoon will do you no good.

my favourite shooter environment since the original *Half-Life*. Just make sure you're packing a fair amount of RAM – I'd say more than the recommended 1GB myself, since load times are a bugbear.

A DOG'S TALE

OK, so, ten hours into the game, I'm creeping towards a downed helicopter in a sickly forest – not because the story wants me to, but because I know there'll be goodies there. I'm surrounded by a fine radioactive mist, and as I rummage around in my inventory for an anti-radiation injection, I see a blur of movement on the periphery of my monitor – something running between the trees, apparently circling me. Alerted, I worriedly look around and see another skinless dog dashing through the trees parallel to my path. I leg it to a nearby rock, hoping to escape to higher ground, but get savaged from behind before I get halfway there – and killed. As the 'Game Over' motif swims into view I notice one of the dogs dragging my corpse further into the woodland. Now that, my friend, is extremely cool.

Such moments of brilliance, however, come with a price. For one, parts of the interface are brutally unwieldy – the map/mission screen being a particular nightmare to navigate. Learning the way the world works, meanwhile, is largely a

Anomalous materials

Why you might want to think twice about moving into a bungalow outside Sellafield



Fun with radiation.

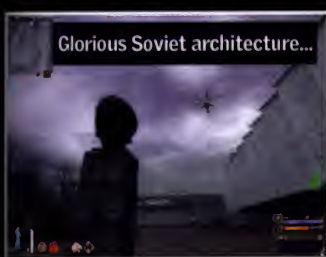
If you ever come across a funny whirly thing, and you happen to be in the direct vicinity of a nuclear reactor, then my advice would be not to walk through it. You will inevitably be electrocuted, whirled around, set on fire or simply turned inside out. Luckily, according to GSC Game World, a quick chuck of a metal bolt will show you where it's safe to walk – because all radioactive anomalies are magnetic, of course (although whether modern science agrees with GSC on this matter is open to debate). As this screenshot more than adequately shows though, the wildlife in and around Chernobyl hasn't quite caught on to the trick of chucking metal around just yet.

Combat too is very good – whether you're deep in corridor-iana or out on the wider vistas of the surface



We can be happy underground.
But we're often not.

"That's it! Drayton Manor is
shit and we're going home!"



Glorious Soviet architecture...

matter of trial and error, since beyond basic textual introductions to jumping, crouching and avoiding anomalies, you're pretty much left to your own devices from square one. Indeed, I only realised I had alternate firing modes about a day or two into reviewing the game.

This reluctance to divulge crucial information works its way into the gameplay as well. Nuggets of information occasionally appear on your screen and in your PDA, but more often than not it feels as if you're expected to learn the hard way. The plotline meanwhile will happily shove you into a darkened bunker with a bundle of telekinetically controlled crates and metal implements, mobile fire anomalies (gaseous forms that burst into flames when you cross them) and a previously unseen invisible flying fire mutant, but at no stage will it even hint at what the hell is going on. Now on one level this is brilliant and daring, and initially insanely great.

But as you sit there smouldering, with no idea what to do, you can't help but think it's the game's obtuse structure that's left you in such a confusing situation. Especially considering that no-one has actually explained what a fire anomaly is or indeed that invisible flying fire-mutants exist.

What this does provide in spades, however, is a supreme element of surprise. You never know quite what's going to happen – you may return to a border, crossing and find a rival Stalker faction fending off a pack of dogs, you may find it vacant, you may find it occupied by your friends. Better still, if you're tasked with defending an NPC and they die, the game simply rolls on without them – the lack of a Game Over screen being nothing but a good thing (even if this does result in stick-thin characterisation, more on which later).

STRANGE DAYS

What's more, this feeling of unpredictability extends to the scripted moments too – there's always a sense of anticipation as you discover a fresh mutant, bear witness to another bold move of artistic direction or have the tables turned on you in the pit of an underground reactor.

Combat too is very good – whether you're deep in corridor-fana or out on the wider vistas of the surface. I'm not saying individual grunt AI is spectacular, but they

The glazed expressions
imply zombie-hood.



certainly don't disappoint either. During earlier parts of the game it's sometimes difficult to perceive whether or not your bullets are connecting, but the satisfaction grows alongside your firepower. As such, the introduction of bullet-absorbing Stalker zombies may be a bum note, but the monster menagerie is otherwise on key, dripfeeding glowing nasties into the game at a measured rate rather than going for outright overkill (see 'Meet The Monsters', page 61).

Overall, there's no doubt that the combat (and the whole game)



Stalkerville

Where roaming murderers meet, drink and grunt at each other



"...and a white wine spritzer."

There are various hub-like 'safe zones' in *STALKER*'s environments, but the primary one you come across is quite neat. There's a bar, an arena for gladiatorial gunplay and lots of men with guns of varying size, all of whom seem to have a mission for you. The glaring omission, however, seems to be the fairer sex – who are either too cowardly to come into an irradiated zone full of men intent on killing each other, or just that little bit too sensible. Either way, don't expect romance. Unless grunting, unspoken man-passion is your bag.

gets more and more satisfying the longer you play. The guns just keep getting better throughout, and my oh my, the higher-powered weapons of *STALKER* are special. I struggle to think of the last time I played a game with a meatier arsenal than this – it might even be as far back as *Far Cry*. The necessity of ammo-juggling makes every bullet count, and when that bullet strikes cranial matter, both you and the ragdoll system know it straight away. Extremely satisfying stuff.

The health system is also a welcome relief from the surge in magically regenerating war heroes we've seen of late. If you get shot even once you bleed, and if you carry on bleeding you die, meaning bandages are essential. If you're particularly close to death, meanwhile, an entire med-pack can be used to regenerate – though if you're just feeling a bit off-colour you can usually find a Ukrainian sausage to munch.

Cleverly, this health system is shared by your human enemies, so the more swiftly

you dispatch enemies, the more likely you are to find health items in their backpacks. By the same token, wounded enemies will often lope off, leaking from multiple bullet holes, only to be found lying near-dead on the floor. It's at this point that I usually bend down and issue a merciful stab of the knife, but friendly AI, quite brilliantly, will sometimes wander over to their helpless foe and calmly shoot them in the head.

Life's tough in the wasteland you see. And on top of all this there's radiation to consider, the effects of which can be faced down with the use of vodka and injections.

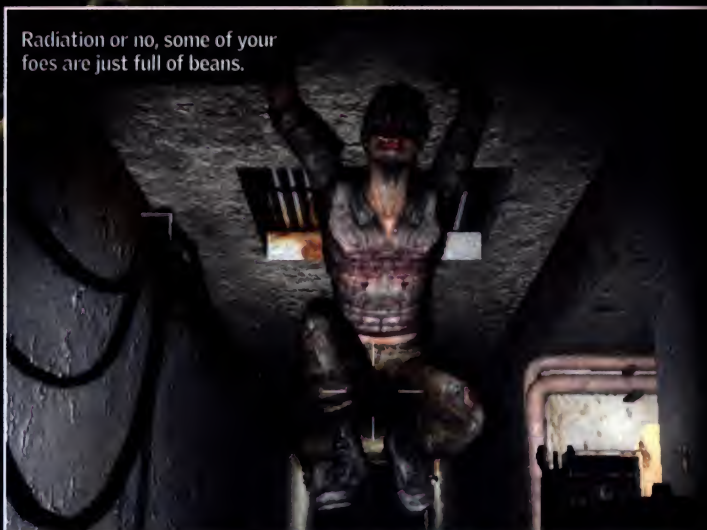
UNCLEAR MELTDOWN

The most troubling of all *STALKER*'s hurdles though, is the fact that it's bereft of characters and, indeed, character. What voice-acting exists is OK, bar some repeated AI barks, but most of the NPCs simply wibble on in text form, text that's so devoid of life or sense that it's very hard to care about anything but the rudiments of what's going on. The storyline, whether told in endless reams of humourless dialogue or revealed in bemusing flashbacks at key moments, is borderline unapproachable.

Even details on the game's setting and history are hazy unless you flick through text that sits somewhere between Proust and a DVD player manual in terms of readability. You can't help but wonder how fraught the game's translation processes were, because from this it's hard to understand exactly why each faction is so murderously angry with each other, or what the hell is going on in the various gloomy facilities you find yourself poking around in.

I won't lie to you, it's not what we were promised all those years ago, but that's no reason to be ungrateful

Radiation or no, some of your foes are just full of beans.



A tragic, yet hilarious way to go.

Meet the monsters! STALKER's mutant menagerie under the microscope



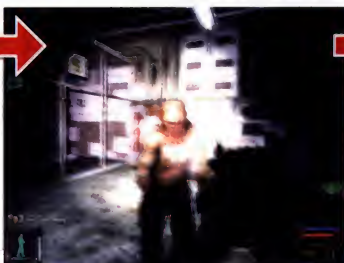
BLIND DOG

With a keen sense of smell, these mutts hunt in packs – and if they catch a whiff of you can be quite a handful.



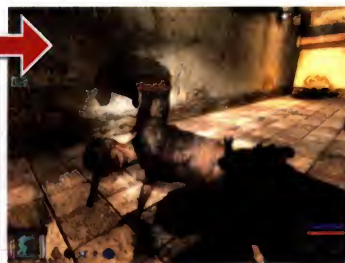
BLOODSUCKER

This fabulous white tentacle-mouthed beast may turn invisible if he fancies it – but still makes for good hunting.



CONTROLLER

This odd beast takes over your mind by forcing your viewpoint to fly up to his mug in 'Extreme Close-up!' fashion.



SNORK

What's scarier than a man in a gas mask who can leap huge distances and make odd screaming noises? Not much.

grind and eventual character benefits, there seems little point in completing them here since the main story arc is so much more fun and the progress so much more tangible.

As for earning cash, well you rarely have too many money problems during your time in Chernobyl anyway. The meat of *STALKER* is in killing and collecting and, without the RPG dynamics of a *Fallout* or the undisputed writing talents of a *WOW* quest writer, there's just no impetus to carry out such tasks.

WALKING THE LINE

If you doubt me, just wait till you see the higgledy-piggledy way these tasks are given and completed. Sure, you can wander everywhere, nosing around in every nook and cranny, and complete various missions that randomly crop up. But when the thinking behind their design is so resolutely linear, any benefit gained from their zany A-Life representation is quickly drowned. I'm sad to say it, but the way you'll find yourself playing *STALKER* is nowhere near the open-ended paradise first touted all those years ago.

Here's the big question though – after so many years (six by our count) and so much strife, is the game finished? Well yes, in as much as it's a full game without too many glitches (you can expect a patch, but not a giant *Boiling Point*-style one). On top of that, it's an entirely enjoyable experience, so in that sense, yes, it's finished.

This isn't to say, however, that you can't see the joins. On the map screen for example, there are various areas that were clearly once in contention for inclusion but met the vicious gnashings of the scissors of fate: you'll find yourself leaving one area through a creaky gate and magically entering the next zone through a road tunnel.

The interactions with other Stalkers also seem empty compared with what the interface seems prepped for – witness the (now irrelevant) ladder system showing your rank in the world of Stalkers, and the sudden appearance of your rival's stashes on your PDA once you've offed them.

Finally, as I've already indicated, the game's dialogue and storytelling techniques are cumbersome in the extreme. The game is superb at conjuring up visual treats –

the shadows of zombies projected onto a wall by bright orange firelight for example – but the smooth gaming putty needed to fill in the gaps between these wonders is striking in its absence.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

But despite all this, has it been worth the wait? In 25 words or less... Yes. Should you, as a connoisseur and veteran of FPS games, buy it? Again, yes. *STALKER*, like *Far Cry* and *Deus Ex* before it, feels like a defiantly hardcore outing in PC gaming. I won't lie to you, it's not what we were promised all those years ago; but that's no reason to be ungrateful either. As a brave experiment in all-action shootery *STALKER* has certainly succeeded, though with its dearth of personality and many peculiar foibles, you can't help but wish that the publishers had granted GSC some extra time to polish their creation. Oh, hang on a minute... **PC!**



PCZONE

Graphics Stunning graphical tricks and effects
Sound Excellent throughout
Multiplayer Not stunning, but worth a spin

- ✓ Awesome setting
- ✓ Great action, brilliant high-end weapons
- ✓ Artificial Life fun to be around
- ✓ Genuinely does new stuff
- ✗ Awkward side missions
- ✗ Crap script, storytelling and characters

85

Good carcinogenic fun

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE
www.supremecommander.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

An epic and intense sci-fi strategy gem from the creator of *Total Annihilation*, sporting gargantuan maps and hundreds of units.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

COMPANY OF HEROES 93%

SUPREME COMMANDER 88%

GROUND CONTROL II 84%

SUPREME COMMANDER

Martin Korda steps into a giant robot suit and prepares for war in this behemoth of an RTS

I'M KNACKERED. WELL and truly zonked. It's no exaggeration to say that never, ever, has a game taken so much out of me. After the best part of a week sealed inside a room with nothing but a copy of *Supreme Commander* and a PC for company, I've emerged, eyes streaked like a whipped hide, back bent like an arthritic centenarian who's just been rabbit-punched in the spleen and totally, utterly exhilarated. Put me back in, I want some more...

For the past year (well, 14 months if

you want to be picky) we've been told that *Supreme Commander* would be one of the most intense RTS experiences of all time. And you know what? For once, the hype has actually been vindicated.

After years of self-imposed exile from the strategy fold, *Supreme Commander* proves to be a magnificent return to the genre for PC gaming legend Chris Taylor, who rose to prominence way back in 1997 with the sublime *Total Annihilation* – a game to which *Supreme Commander* bears more than a passing resemblance. And if you've ever played *Total Annihilation*, you'll know that's no bad thing.

However, rather than simply rehashing past glories with glitzier graphics, Taylor and his team at Gas Powered Games have masterfully re-invented the template by giving it a thorough 21st century makeover.

SO WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT THEN?

Well, I'll tell you. Having mastered the art of long-distance space travel, humanity – aka the United Earth Federation – has spread to the far reaches of the galaxy, using its conventionally armed (with a few nukes thrown in for good measure) armies to exterminate any resistance it meets,

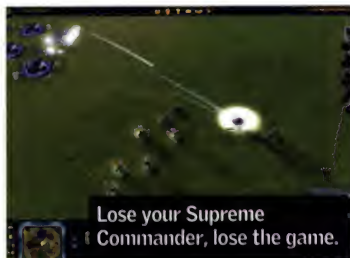


Imagine the largest RTS level ever. Now double it. Then double it again

Cybran technology is highly mech-orientated.



Lose your Supreme Commander, lose the game.



It looks almost too pretty to destroy. Almost...



including a spiritual alien race called the Seraphim. Which, as it transpires, was a bit of a boo-boo...

Enchanted by the Seraphim's way of life, a pocket of intergalactic hippies breaks away from the UEF and creates the Aeon faction, which sets its will against the UEF's expansionist ethos with an array of sleek, hovering and highly powerful weapons.

With me so far? Good. Now, while these two sides are knocking chunks of space debris out of each other, a clever fellow called Dr Brackman works out how to combine computer chips with human brains. Thus, the Cybran nation is born – a force boasting hulking mechanised robots and cybernetic warriors.

Forced to flee Earth due to persecution by the UEF and considered abominations by the Aeon, the Cybrans are soon sucked into a three-way conflict, where everyone hates

everyone else and just wants to kill, kill and kill some more... Then shoot the dead bodies in case they're still alive and just pretending to be dead. So begins the Infinite War.

Fast-forward 1,000 years and the UEF are on the back foot and close to defeat, while Cybran sleeper cells are rising throughout the galaxy and the Aeon are in the ascendancy. And that's right about where you come in.

SIZE IS EVERYTHING

As a fledgling commander, you control a massive battlefield robot called the Supreme Commander (check out 'Super Supreme', below right, for the full lowdown on these bad boys), a vehicle that can construct and repair as well as dismantle and annihilate bases. With the war balanced on the edge of a meat cleaver, it's your job to turn the tide and end the conflict.

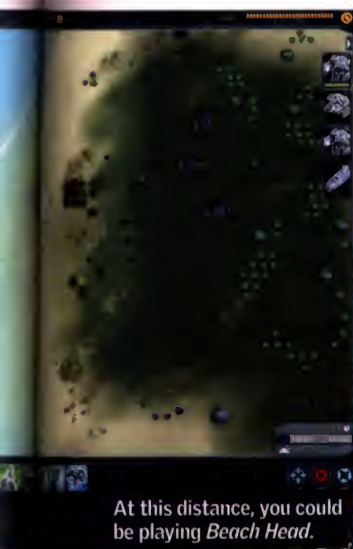
Before we delve any further, let me just prepare you for the sheer scope and scale of this game. Actually, you may want to sit down for this part.

Imagine the largest base-building RTS level you've ever played. Go on, think really hard. That's it... Now double it. Then double it again. Now add a little bit more to the edges. There, you've got it. Pretty big, huh?

It's no exaggeration to say that most of *Supreme Commander*'s levels are akin to four or five standard RTS missions. Starting

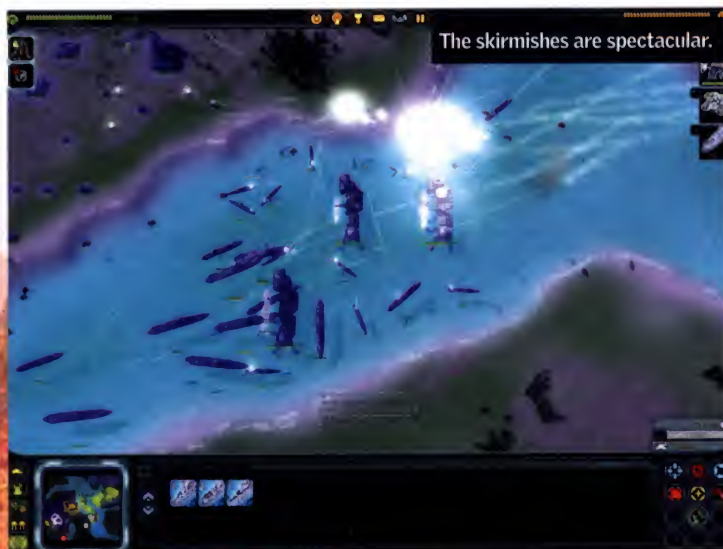
off with just a third of the map visible, you begin by constructing your base and building up an army of land, air and sea units. Once your primary objective has been completed, another section of the map is unveiled and a new objective issued. And so it continues.

Forget the half-hour skirmishes of RTS games of yore – this is futuristic warfare at its most intense, taxing and titanic. Missions can take several hours to complete,



At this distance, you could be playing *Beach Head*.

The skirmishes are spectacular.



New objectives are issued throughout each level.



I don't know what it is, but it's heading right for me.

Super supreme

Big stompy arse-kicking robots at their very best



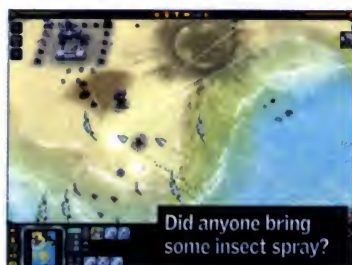
Each faction has a unique Supreme Commander.

As you've probably guessed from the title, your Supreme Commander is the unit around which your entire battle strategy revolves. However, rather than just being an all-powerful walking turret, your Commander can be utilised and customised in a variety of different ways.

Bearing in mind that you lose the level once your Commander has been destroyed, you may want to play it safe and upgrade his base-building and defensive capabilities, keeping him inside the confines of your base to coordinate its expansion.

However, you might be horrified by the idea of hiding away your ultimate weapon, and will instead choose to make use of his array of offensive upgrades, including more powerful and faster guns, torpedoes, cloaking devices and teleporters. Not only is this the bolder tactic, it's almost certainly more fun.

REVIEWSSUPREMECOMMANDER



during which you'll be forced to build massive attack forces as you sally out of the confines of your camp and establish secondary bases around the map.

INCESSANT

It's a war of attrition, a war of patience and a war of perseverance, where thousands of units are expended to gain a foothold on the map's Mass deposits (the game's only uniquely mineable resource) and edge ever closer to victory.

From the very first minute you're beset by enemy attacks, probing and pushing at every weak spot in your defences. It's a maelstrom of unrelenting carnage.

Squadrons of aerial units dogfight above booming anti-aircraft guns in one sector, while two mighty armadas clash on the seas in another. Each and every bullet, laser pulse and missile is calculated through space, with wayward shots pounding into the surrounding landscape and igniting trees.

ZOOM TO MANOEUVRE

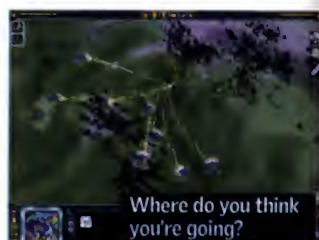
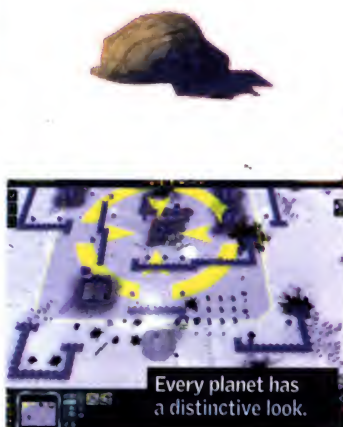
Using the full gamut of combined arms forces is one of the keys to victory, as is fully mastering the stunning and highly original tactical map of the entire level. Cleverly, this map can be accessed straight from the battlefield, simply by zooming out as far as possible, before zooming back into any area simply by pointing the cursor and rolling your mouse wheel.

It's not long before you realise this isn't so much a strategy game as an action epic, a cauldron of death where speed of thought and brute force are often required to reap the greatest triumphs.

By the time each map has been fully revealed, there'll be half a dozen battles raging across the level, with units intelligently engaging the enemy whenever they come into range. It's here that the tactical map becomes invaluable, and there's even an option to split the screen between the battlefield and the tactical map, a design decision which verges on genius.

With every passing mission the stakes are raised both strategically and in terms of the plot, which charts your faction's struggle for survival through a set of well-acted briefings, cut-scenes and in-game events.

At this stage it's more than likely that if you're of an inquisitive nature, you'll have already taken a sneaky peak at the score



and are wondering why, given what you've read so far, *Supreme Commander* hasn't scored even more highly than it has.

MIGHT MAKES RIGHT

The thing is, for all its originality, many of *Supreme Commander*'s levels come down to one variable: numbers. Attempting to use a small, carefully compiled strike force to strategically overpower your foe is virtually impossible. In fact, more often than not, you'll find yourself resorting to the age-old tactic of building up a titanic force of ground, air and sea units while hiding behind your base defences, before unleashing them on your equally well-defended opponent.

That's not to say that this unsubtle mechanic isn't fun in its own way, but for a game of *Supreme Commander*'s scope – especially one with such a brilliantly designed tactical map – you can't help but feel ever so slightly disappointed.

Granted, you can coordinate attacks for greater effect, but if you lack the numbers, it doesn't matter how cunning your strategy is,

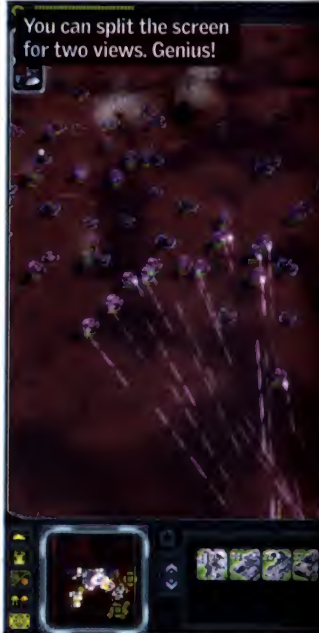
From the very first minute you're beset by enemy attacks... It's a maelstrom of unrelenting carnage

as you'll simply get wiped out and have to start building a whole new force from scratch. And believe me, this can take a very, very long time indeed.

It's a problem that's compounded by a control interface that's just not quite intuitive enough for a game of this scale. With so many units on each level and with action this frenetic, control is everything and you sometimes feel like you don't quite have enough of it.

Throw in some suspect pathfinding when trying to move a larger body of troops (40 units and above), and you're left with a game that at times leaves you as frustrated as it does elated.

One further thing to watch out for is how resource-hungry the game is. Unless you're packing at least 3GHz of processing grunt,





Watch gleefully from above as you pound your enemies from afar.

Big bubbles, no troubles.

Unlock hell

Upgrading takes time, but it's soooooo worth the wait

Building the big guns take a whole lotta precious time.



Supreme Commander's tech tree has several tiers, each giving access to a more impressive array of firepower. Although the look of each side's weaponry is distinctly different, there's little to differentiate the standard units in terms of abilities. Each side also possesses a host of artillery, anti-aircraft and missile placements including nukes which, unlike those in many other RTS games, really do live up to expectations.

However, once you've reached the pinnacle of the tech tree, it's time to roll out the big guns. We're talking massive, devastating experimental weapons that'll make your eyes pop out in awe. But be warned, you're in for one hell of a wait while they get built. I won't spoil it for you by telling you what these über-weapons are, but believe me – once you start making them, all other units look like water pistols.

you're likely to experience some major slowdown towards the end of most levels, while a 256MB 3D card or better is also a must if you want to play with anything approaching an acceptable level of detail.

SUPER BUT NOT QUITE SUPREME

It's always satisfying to come across a genuinely innovative and intelligent title, one that not only attempts to raise the bar for its genre but succeeds with aplomb. While *Supreme Commander* may be slightly flawed in places, it's still a wondrous

rendition of futuristic combat, and one of the finest specimens of 21st century RTS gaming you can currently buy. What's more, the epic gameplay is (ahem) Taylor-made for some of the finest multiplayer RTS action you're likely to experience any time soon, making this one package that any lover of all-out action warfare simply can't allow themselves to overlook. It might not be perfect, but it's still supremely good. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Decent if not amazing
Sound Fittingly rousing with booming SFX
Multiplayer Online mayhem of the highest calibre

- ✓ Humongous battlefields
- ✓ Sublime map system
- ✓ Intense beyond belief
- ✓ Stonking multiplayer
- ✗ Some control issues
- ✗ Limited tactical palette

88

An RTS leviathan



Ah, the *TrackMania* jumps. Everyone loves the jumps!



TRACKMANIA UNITED

Will Porter goes insania for *TrackMania*. And other stories...



DEVELOPER Nadeo
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE
www.tm-united.com
ETA March 9
PRICE £29.99

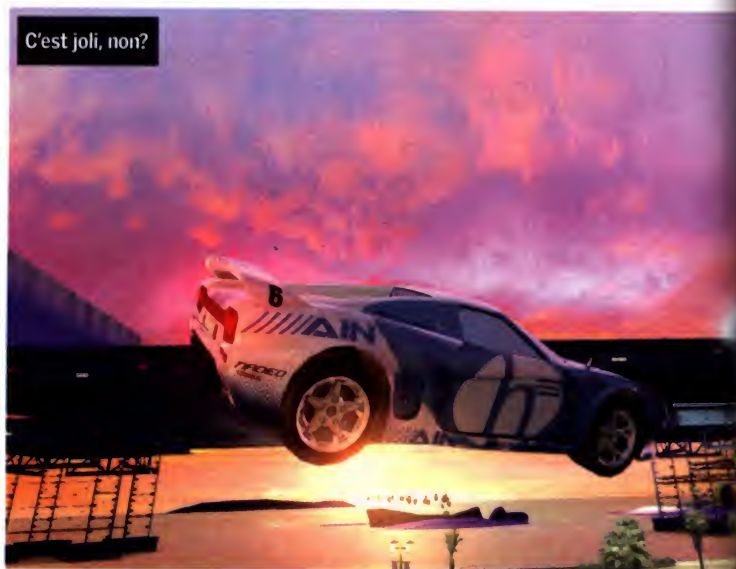
SOMETIMES I HATE being a PC gamer. *Battlefield* is the usual culprit – trudging through its server listings, finding decently populated servers, struggling with patches, having my daily battle with PunkBuster.

Which is why (after a bizarrely hassle-free *StarForce* installation); I was gobsmacked, thunderstruck and 'Cor Blimey, Mister!'-ed to find myself playing online on a downloaded map within a single solitary minute of booting up *TrackMania: United*. For speed, intelligence, community-thinking and sheer effortless design, Nadeo have pretty much trumped the online systems of every game I've ever played. Mr Steam, Mr EA Downloader – the French have effortlessly bettered you.

SACRE BLEU

In *United*, you get a daily allowance of coppers, alongside those that you earn, to spend on tracks and car skins within the community – all of which can be accessed through the game's interface rather than on the traditional gallic websites. Not only this, but every single-player track you race on comes coupled with the top times that other *TrackManiacs* have recorded – as well as access to downloadable replays if you want to steal their race tactics. The thing's a bloody marvel.

Even more ingeniously, each player is slotted within country and regional borders – meaning that finding a UK-only server is a breeze, and that as of right now I can confidently inform you that I'm the tenth best *TrackMania* racer in London. Something that perhaps won't last come the game's release – but should be something to tell the grandkids nevertheless.



I hate going on about graphics, but the stark beauty of *TM* is clear

AT A GLANCE...

Superb racer/puzzler that features mind-numbing speeds alongside online and customisation features to die for. A better invention than *Alpen*.

System requirements

2

HOW IT STACKS

TRACKMANIA UNITED 86%

TRACKMANIA SUNRISE 83%

TRACKMANIA 79%

Behind this superb new façade lies the same game as ever – here spanning every game mode and every setting previously touched by Nadeo in their repeatedly successful quest to make French people not say "Bof..." and shrug, but instead twirl their little moustaches and say: "Hon-hi-hon-hi-hon" in a pleasant manner.

OH-LA-LA

Race (zoomy, jumpy, against the clock), Puzzle (construct a track, connect the checkpoints, race and cheat) and Platform (adventure playgrounds for cars) are run riot through by various cars, from high-powered, skyscraper-leaping jet cars to dirt-rally-cars and slidey, ice track trucks. I'm not going to lie though: the fast cars with the loopy, jumpy tracks are the best of the bunch.

Hit 88mph and this happens.



I made this track. Honest.



Attention boy racers

This is not *Need For Burnout IV: Extreme*. Or whatever...

Those arrows mean 'this way'.



TrackMania is many things, but it isn't much to do with traditional racing. There are go-faster stripes perhaps, but no alloys, no engines, no collision detection, no hip-hop soundtrack... It's simply about the time and the stunts. It's the *Herbie Goes Bananas* of racers. You half expect the rear end of your car to come loose and win the race, or perhaps wave its bonnet in an amusing fashion at a lady ghost car. It doesn't though.



Funky camera angles help the visuals, but hinder driving.

Problems? The cinematic camera that kicks in on the more epic jumps and ramps can completely wreck your race mojo – but, in all fairness, does look pretty cool.

The track difficulty, meanwhile, has been toned down from *Sunrise* et al (which was anything but noob-friendly), but the game still revels in making your life difficult with tricky landings and occasional slips in signposting. Hasty restarts are, however, as much part of the game as blinking out sweaty tears in a lengthy session. The main problem, however, is that there's no way on god's green earth that you'll be anywhere near as good as those on the leaderboard.

Put simply, this is the best package of one of the best semi-underground games available. And I normally hate banging on about graphics – but the stark beauty of *TM* should be clear to one and all. Every time I shut my eyes I see those shimmering blue skies and blinding flashes of colour – and, yes kids, that's because it's been burnt into my retinas. *TrackMania United* is officially, totally great. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Pretty wonderful really
Sound Engine noises, decent music
Multiplayer Oodles. Great online capabilities

- ✓ Fiercely addictive
- ✓ Superb online community system
- ✓ Effortlessly easy on the eye
- ✓ Just... One... More... Go
- ✗ Some modes better than others
- ✗ More time trials than proper racing

86

Another maniac funday

“Ball-gripping gameplay”

ign.com

“Something akin to the Second Coming”

PC Format

“Worth the wait”

PC Format

“Bigger and better than Flashpoint”

PC Zone

“It's about making you feel like a real soldier”

PC Gamer

“Makes Battlefield look like Turok”

PC Gamer

“An incredible experience”

PC Gamer

THE ULTIMATE COMBAT SIMULATION...



AGATHA CHRISTIE: MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Delays expected...

DEVELOPER The Adventure Company
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE
www.agathachristiegame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 2

NOBODY SEEMS TO have informed The Adventure Company that adventure gaming is, by most accounts, pretty much a dead genre. Ploughing on regardless with Agatha Christie's tales, the majority of *Murder On The Orient Express* takes place upon the luxurious train itself, comprising of four carriages and the odd outdoors scene. Even if you haven't read the book or seen the film, the title makes it pretty obvious what happens. However, in a deviation from the original, you play as an extra character, tasked with uncovering the murderer instead of the moustachioed Poirot.

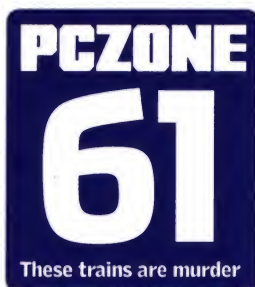
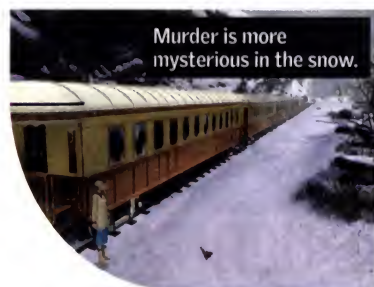
Within this limited environment, things are pretty detailed with a combination of static background

graphics and a few moving objects just to remind us we are indeed in the 21st century, although the characters don't seem up to the same levels.

Your task is to traverse the carriages, picking up clues, taking fingerprints and questioning suspects. Luckily, for once it's reasonably clear what most objects are for, so you'll spend less time randomly clicking on objects to combine together, although being an adventure game, this does still feature at points.

The dialogue is disappointing, being a case of exhausting the options rather than picking the right thing to say. Plus, with the limited setting, things soon start to feel repetitive. Throw in the normal adventure game niggles such as getting stuck and trying everything in your inventory before realising that you've just missed something and it soon becomes clear that while *MOTOE* may satisfy die-hard adventure game fans, it's probably arrived way too late for the rest of us. A bit like trains really.

Suzi Wallace



THE MARK

I said put that gun down, you silly man

DEVELOPER T7 Games
PUBLISHER JoWood
WEBSITE www.jowood.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

System requirements 3

THE BRITISH AND the Americans have a very different way of waging war.

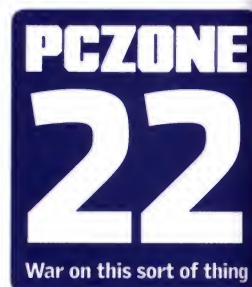
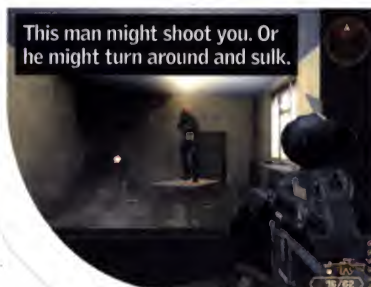
The Mark captures this difference perfectly, and with a real sense of understated panache. The difference is this: when Fletcher, your US 'go go go' character shoots a bad guy, he shouts: "Hope that hurt!" But when Hawke – the sneaky camp Englishman – kills someone, he snidely oils: "Hope that didn't hurt". Spot the difference? The English are sarcastic to corpses.

Before going back to why the game is funny, let me first tell you why it's rubbish. First, the AI is on a par with *R-Type*. Learn where they are, allow for some sideways movement and shoot them. That's not to say it's easy – their bullets damage you plenty and they're quick to fire – but it's not a satisfying game to beat. The inclusion of depth of field,

bullet-time and the rest make it feel like a box-checking project. It's like putting a plastic tiara on a drunken goat, and you'd be well advised to try the demo first – the frame-rate dropped to an unplayable 8fps on our less macho machine.

Make no mistake, this game is two oversized coal sacks of crap – but *The Mark* has a redeeming hilarity. Playing as Fletcher, I'd often turn around to see Hawke sliding wordlessly and erratically, in what can only be described as a moonwalk line-dance. One soldier took time out from shooting at me to jump on a table and face the other way, like he was sulking. If T7 Games had just put everyone on AI and let you watch, *The Mark* would have been funnier than *Team America*. Sadly it's a game, and it's shit.

Jon Blyth



ARMA

ARMED ASSAULT

**A NEW GAME FROM
THE CREATORS OF
OPERATION FLASHPOINT***

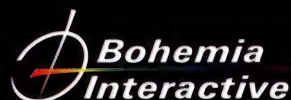


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The Underbog: about as friendly as it sounds.



Hellfire Citadel, the first Outlands instance.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE



Keeping out of sight in Nagrand.



The portal is open, the game is live and *Rhianna Pratchett* is in bear-form...

DEVELOPER Blizzard Entertainment
PUBLISHER Vivendi Games
WEBSITE www.worldofwarcraft.com/burningcrusade
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Without *WOW* there'd be no *Burning Crusade*. However, the expansion has eclipsed the original and represents everything Blizzard does best.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE BURNING CRUSADE 93%
EVERQUEST II: ECHOES OF PAYDOWER 83%

MY FIRST KISS was with a French exchange student. I wore braces. He had tousled hair. Neither of us understood each other. We kissed round the back of the school swimming pool. It was magical, if a bit wet. I lost an earring. After he went home, we never spoke again, but I didn't care because every moment was etched on my brain. And, apparently, still is.

My first experiences with the original *World Of Warcraft* are indelibly marked on my brain, like that first kiss. When I first fell in love back then, I was a Night Elf rogue. Instead of tousled hair there was the stunning elven architecture – trees spiralling into the sky, higher than I could crane my mouse. Everywhere there was colour, everywhere there was dancing.

OLD HAND

By the time I reached level 60 I was rolling with the Horde as a less-than-lithe tauren druid. But no matter how many instances I tried, no matter how many small corners of the world I uncovered, I could never get back that initial feeling of stepping into *WOW* for the first time – that first kiss that takes you into a whole new world of

fumbles, gropes and late night condom-runs. Or, alternatively, epic battles, beautiful new lands and life-sucking addiction.

Or at least that was the case until I, along with half the civilised world, installed *WOW's* expansion pack, *The Burning Crusade*. Joy of joys, it felt new again! New things to see, to talk to, to kill, to loot, to pick, to eat! The colours were back, and oh how I danced – in bear-form. And that's what makes *The Burning Crusade* such a joy for the great and the grizzled, like me.

The six-area strong new continent of the Outlands is a fantastic addition to the *WOW* experience. So let's start there, on the other side of the Dark Portal.

ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

The continent of Outlands is where the big kids go to play, beyond the Dark Portal which is situated in the Blasted Lands. Primarily, it extends the game world for the high-leveller (levels 58 and above) who've previously been kicking their heels in the dust, scraping together honour points or rep just so they could look spiffing as they go, well, absolutely nowhere really. If you're a *WOW* long-timer, you might have found that



Bombing run!



Don't trust elves. Kill the buggers!



Just walk away slowly.



Never stand with your back to a void.

New things to see, to talk to, to kill, to loot, to pick, to eat! The colours were back, and oh how I danced...

after a while – unless you were heavily into PvP – nothing too interesting was dropping for you. If it did, it was so close to what you already possessed that it was hardly worth the time it took to acquire it. As for anything remotely exciting coming up on the auction house, forget it.

But in the Outlands, everything's new and suddenly you're swapping your weapons and armour every few drops. Your pockets are weighed down with gold and even the crap sells better than it used to in Azeroth. Guild chat is full of people showing off their new booty, swapping new recipes and exchanging hints and tips on dealing with

the weird and wild Outlands beasts. It's a huge, and much needed adrenalin shot for anyone that's hung in there long enough.

BUG-EYED

Once you get past the rather dreary, war-torn welcome mat of Hellfire Peninsula (which is arguably more breathtaking if you look up rather than down), the scenery in this six-area continent is stunning. From the giant glowing mushroom-themed area of Zangarmarsh (everyone's favourite) to the cool calm of the Terokkar Forest and the lush green hills of Nagrand, there are bucketloads of goodies



And it even matches my hair!



Rumble in the jungle

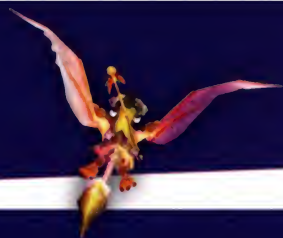
If you go down to the fungoid marsh today...



The mushroom forests of Zangarmarsh.

Zangarmarsh is possibly the most dribble-inducing area of the Outlands and it's one you'll want to hang around in for a very long time. There's a whole 'Honey, I Shrunk the Kids meets *Fantasia* meets *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*' vibe going on. Giant glowing mushrooms fill the area, while overgrown fireflies, floating bats and creatures that look like organic versions of the stalkers from *Half-Life 2* plod through its depths.

At the centre of Zangarmarsh is Coilfang Reservoir, an underwater instance, similar to the Sunken Temple, which contains three five-man instances and a 25-player raid instance.



Leaving home

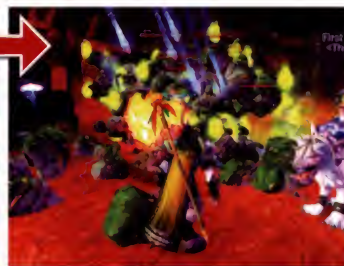
A brief beginners' guide to the Outlands



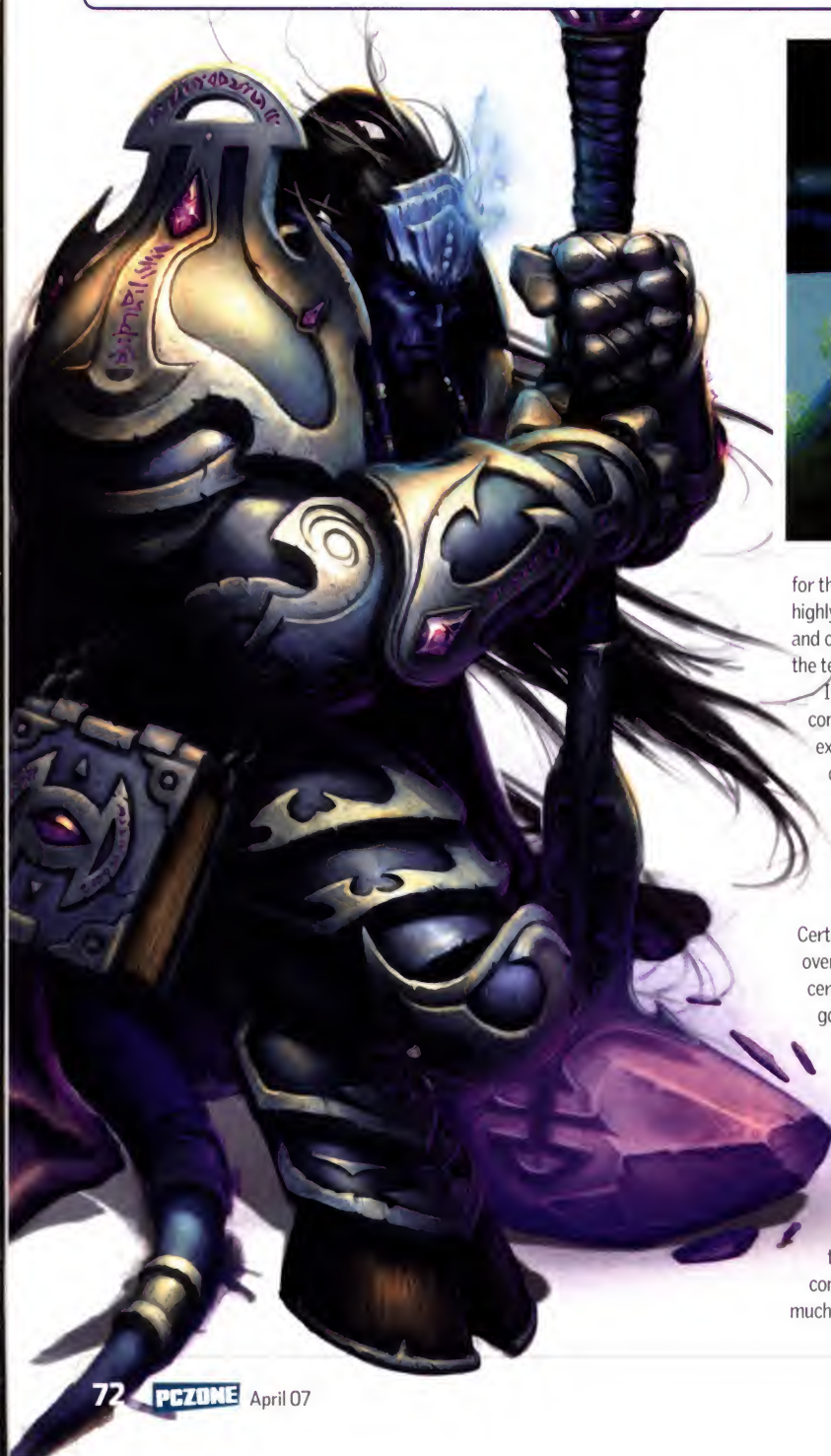
Find the Dark Portal: it's in the east of the Blasted Lands. Just follow the big flashes of lightning – you can't miss it. Dismount and go on through.



Ignore the mega-death battle on the other side. It will only lead to pain. Find the first flight point and catch a lift to Thrallmar or Honor Hold.



Get out there and find some quests! Anywhere that's being attacked by random hellish beasts is usually a good spot to make some cash.



I've changed my mind, I'll have the chicken!

for the eyes. *WOW* has always been a highly visual game, with a depth of style and character that will undoubtedly stand the test of time.

In fact, it's all so lovely and new that it contributes to one of the few flaws of the expansion – namely that it makes some of the high-level areas and instances that reside in the main continents of Kalimdor and the Eastern Kingdoms look rather redundant.

THE OLD WORLD

Certainly Blizzard have predicted this surge over to the Outlands and they've put certain measures in place to keep you going back to the mainland, just so you don't forget it's there. For starters, there are no auction houses in the Outlands. It sounds outrageous at first. But then you realise that it keeps all the new gear from the Outlands filtering through the rest of the game (even for people without the expansion). You also realise that if this feature wasn't there, the poor old continents probably wouldn't even get so much as a postcard from you.

But it's not like you have to keep popping in and out of Dark Portal to get home. Shattrath, the main shared city of the continent is also a city of portals. So you can very easily get back to any other main city in the game. However, the portals are one way. Ha ha! So it's back to the jolly green wibbling giant in the Blasted Lands or you'll be stuck there until your hearthstone warms up.

Of course, there are now scaleable dungeons in Kalimdor and the Eastern Kingdoms and new instances such as the Caverns of Time (68+) to go back for. But who really wants to trundle around in Stratholme for the umpteenth time when there's a brand new continent all shiny and new waiting to be discovered?

NEWCOMERS

A fair amount has been written about the Blood Elves (Horde) and the Draenei (Alliance), the two new races in *The Burning Crusade*. But what's surprising is how well they fit into the overall live game.

Each race seems to complete the feel of the Alliance and Horde line-ups. The Blood Elves fulfil the Horde's need for something a bit pretty to look at (and yes, the Blood Elf



Silvermoon by night.

'Must-buy' doesn't seem strong enough. There should be some kind of law forcing every player to have it

starting area is full of salivating ex-Alliansers); and the Draenei lend a bit of sci-fi shenanigans to the Alliance's rather pedestrian line-up. On top of that, the Blood Elves bring the class of Paladin to the Horde, while the Draenei come with a bit of hot Shaman action.

All the races in the game have had a few twiddles and tweaks, much of which was put in place before *Burning Crusade* went fully live. Armour and weapons specifically targeted at certain races are also more prevalent. Several wish-list items have been satisfied, including a personal one of mine that means druids can now get feral-specific gear, which enhances their power in cat, dire-bear or Moonkin form.

Every professional also gets its own upgrades. Herbalists have new and exotic plants to pick, while tailors can use the ethereal-sounding netherweave cloth to make new garments and slotted bags that exceed the once decadent-sounding level of 16. There are also new ores for miners, who can now also dig up gems to facilitate the game's new gem-crafting skill. Again, all

these elements are drip-fed into all the other levels in the game. Even if you haven't purchased *Burning Crusade* yet, you're going to see a hundred little hints about what you're missing out on.

Put simply, *Burning Crusade* is an astounding piece of work that has a huge impact for all players of the game. Blizzard have learned a lot since the game was first released and it's all paid off. It's simply a slicker, more polished offering than the original game, and that in itself seems so many months and numerous patches ago, that it's hard to remember it at all.

NOBODY'S PERFECT

There are, as you'd expect, a few small flaws and quest bugs that cause the occasional niggle, and at peak times there are short periods of lag in crowded areas. However, Blizzard have always been pretty militant about stamping those out, so no alarm bells are ringing just yet.

With the new continent, races and additions to almost every aspect of the game coming in at a flat-rate price, it's

Up, up and away

If you're not up, you ain't down



Walking is sooo 2006.

Yes, airborne mounts are now out and about, flying the skies of the Outlands, spitting on those too lowly to afford one yet. The Alliance has gryphons, while the Horde straddle wyverns. They'll set you back 800 gold and you'll need to be level 70 to ride one. There are elite versions of both mounts and if you're feeling particular masochistic, you can always work towards an elite Netherdrake mount.

There are also new land-based mounts for the new races. On the whole, the Draenei have a better deal with their rather cuddly looking elephantine Elekk mounts. The Blood Elves' Cockatrice, meanwhile, looks like it's constructed from the cast of *Sesame Street*.



Even cows need a little comfort.



Taking time out in Shattrath.



Taking the tube to Coilfang Reservoir.

surely going to be a rare thing to find a *WOW* player without *The Burning Crusade*. In fact, 'must-buy' doesn't seem strong enough. There should probably be some kind of law forcing every player to have it. For their own good, of course.

The Burning Crusade's only real flaw is that it so outshines what has gone before. What was once beautiful only seems tarnished by the presence of a more sublime, more elegant beauty. Maybe the old country will stop looking like such a ghost town once the novelty wears off. But it won't be for a while, because this is one burning feeling that you'll be happy to hang on to. **PC7**

PCZONE

Graphics Jaw-dropping
Sound On a par with the rest of the game
Multiplayer Yes, and nothing but!

- ✓ Fantastic new continent
- ✓ Two great new races that slot in nicely
- ✓ Lots of advancements across the game
- ✓ Fun for high and low levels
- ✗ Makes the old kingdoms look a bit... Old
- ✗ A few small bugs and glitches

93

All you wanted and more



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Freedom to evolve in either the technological or spiritual paths is in your hands and you must choose your comrades wisely to provide a balance and benefit to your efforts - but be cautious, any bias in your choices will either corrupt or upgrade the growing world around you.

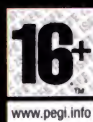
Depending on YOUR point of view.



...Drawn together

OUT MARCH 2007

SILVERFALL



PC DVD ROM RPG





BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY

Dan Griliopoulos likes nothing better than a spot of naval warfare...

DEVELOPER Eidos Hungary
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE
www.battlestations.net
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

SAD TO SAY, but the reported 'lost at sea' status of *Battlestations: Midway* sometime after its announcement in 2004 wasn't greeted with the usual sorrow and rending of hair, but more with the irritated 'tch' noises people make when the cat's pissed on your second-favourite rug. Considering the lukewarm emotion attached to it, the game's return, steaming at full speed back from the horizon, isn't likely to be greeted by cheering crowds on the dockside. Rather, there's more likely to be a mild interest as to where the f*** it's been. Not all escapees of development hell get the welcome of *Prey*.

The game is based around the naval war in the Pacific. In the main campaign, you take control of two friends, captain Henry Walker and his pilot buddy Donald. You follow their careers and their over-rapid promotions between the tragedy of Pearl Harbor (it was a truly awful film) to the Battle of Midway itself (not quite such a bad movie), some 11 missions later.

The plot is a familiar warfare tale, though it has a touching respect for the Japanese side. There's also a trio of Challenge modes, allowing you to take control of subs, planes or ships in progressively more difficult scenarios,

which are passably entertaining if not particularly challenging.

In the battles, you take control of the various vehicles in arcade-style versions of popular games. So the subs are *Silent Hunter*-lite, the planes are diet *IL-Sturmovik* and the ship bits are faux *Battleships*. You can control them personally or give them orders through a top-down strategy screen. In each mission, you have various objectives to achieve, though it's not always clear what they are. We have no problems with any of this, though controlling any of the craft gets same-y very quickly.

CONTROL FREAK

In addition, as PC users we're more used to complicated controls – but for a game with a simplified console interface, *Midway* can be astoundingly convoluted. Many of the controls are scattered over the keyboard, with different set-ups to remember for each type of craft, but no real reason why. It also feels harder on PC than on consoles, with the higher difficulty levels being nigh-on impossible. As the AI gets more accurate and more damaging, there's simply no way of avoiding its attacks and, as the ships don't repair during battles, take a torpedo and you might as well start again.

Battlestations: Midway doesn't go for realism; however it doesn't go for totally arcade action either. It's not terrible by any means, but it's just not very exciting either. It's not hideous to behold, but it's not up-to-spec. The question is, would anyone have noticed if it had stayed lost at sea? **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Passable, though the console heritage is betrayed
 Sound Lots of explosions, not enough splashing
 Multiplayer Good with lots of players

- ✓ Finally come into dock
- ✓ Nice variety of craft
- ✓ Passably good multiplayer
- ✗ Short campaign
- ✗ Doesn't polish up well
- ✗ Confusing control systems

68

Midway between rubbish and great

AT A GLANCE...

Strategic combat on the Pacific ocean, as you command an entire naval force, including planes, ships and subs, against the Japanese.

System requirements

HOW IT STACKS

SILENT HUNTER III 83%

DANGEROUS WATERS 73%

BS: MIDWAY 68%

GARRY'S MOD



If you build it, they will come...

DEVELOPER

Team Garry

PUBLISHER Valve

WEBSITE www.garrysmud.com

ETA Out now

PRICE \$10 (£5)

System requirements **2**



THE TRUTH IS, *Garry's Mod* is one of the most entertaining titles the PC's ever had. It's grown from a simple mod allowing two *Half-Life 2* items to be strung together with rope, to the sort of all-encompassing construction tool allowing you to build almost anything you can think of. You can build entirely functional Rube Goldberg devices, pose Alyx and the G-Man in compromising positions or build an actual working plane (look out for more next issue in *Freeplay*).

Take it online (and join the right servers), and *Garry's Mod* becomes even more spectacular. The contraptions you'll find people building are simply insane, my personal favourite being a driveable horse which shits out watermelons as

it goes. Blimps are a recurring invention, as are the massive working rocket-launchers people use to shoot them down.

An elaborate trap involving a dead-eyed Alyx asking for a hug, a rocket launcher the size of a building, helicopters, entirely player-built cars, tanks, piston engines, a UFO with a working tractor beam – the things I've seen on servers are simply mind-blowing, and they're all built from very basic components and tools.

This is LEGO

Technic in a game. Hell, get the right add-on and it's LEGO Mindstorms too, with programmable sensors and triggers. It's a toy, and an amazingly powerful one at that. And at just over five quid on Steam, there's no reason not to play.

Steve Hogarty



As modelled by Airfix.



See Alyx fly!



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UBISOFT



JADE EMPIRE

While everybody was kung fu fighting, *Suzy Wallace* was hurling lightning...

DEVELOPER BioWare
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE
jade.bioware.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Glorious action-based RPG set in a rich, mythical Oriental world where everyone's a martial arts expert.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC 94%

JADE EMPIRE 89%

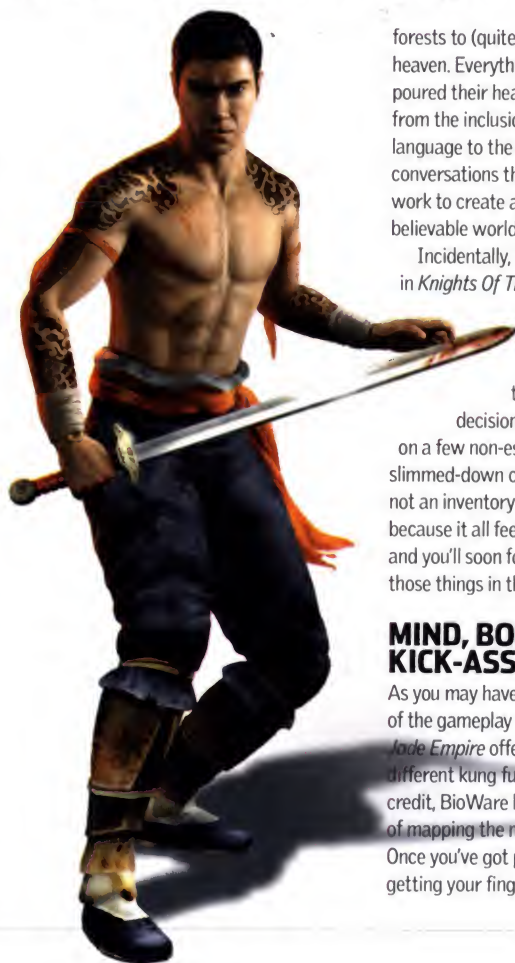
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II 88%

I'M TRYING DESPERATELY to replenish my chi before my scantily-clad female character wades back into kung fu combat with a flaming horse demon. Of course, that's pretty much par for the course in *Jade Empire*, BioWare's latest role-playing epic in which the traditional fantasy trappings have been replaced with a mythical Chinese setting. But being a port of a two-year-old Xbox title, is this a case of glorious reincarnation or ageing master?

FIGHTING SPIRITS

The first act introduces you to the controls and the story. Ghosts are inhabiting the world of the living and after your hometown is destroyed and your master taken by the Lotus Assassins, it's a non-stop action ride to set the world's problems straight. Expect a journey packed to the rafters with a fantastic supporting cast (see 'A Little Help From My Friends' right), and a wide variety of inventive foes, from arrogant fellow students to animal spirits and creepy ghosts.

Jade Empire is set in a massive and lush world, which borrows liberally from several Far Eastern influences. The game offers some of the most beautiful levels we've ever laid eyes on, with plenty of variation on offer too, from fungus-lit caves through haunted



forests to (quite literally) small slices of heaven. Everything feels like BioWare have poured their hearts and souls into the game, from the inclusion of an entirely made-up language to the masses of scrolls, signs and conversations that fill in the back-story and work to create an accessible and hugely believable world.

Incidentally, the morality system seen in *Knights Of The Old Republic* makes a partial return here, though it's been toned down substantially, with less of the black-and-white moral decisions. They've also cut back on a few non-essential RPG staples, with slimmed-down character development and not an inventory in sight. However, don't fret because it all feels marvellously balanced and you'll soon forget that you ever needed those things in the first place.

MIND, BODY AND KICK-ASS MOVES

As you may have realised, however, the core of the gameplay is action. Unlike *KOTOR*, *Jade Empire* offers real-time combat using different kung fu techniques and to their credit, BioWare have done a pretty good job of mapping the mass of controls to the PC. Once you've got past the first hurdle of getting your fingers accustomed to the

A little help from my friends

"I'll be there for yooooou... 'cause you're there for me too..."



Along your journey through *Jade Empire*, you'll gain followers who help out in battle and offer tips and advice. Only one can travel with you at a time, but with customary BioWare flair, the supporting cast is brilliant and diverse. Some of our favourites include sexy fellow student Dawn Star with her impressive swordplay, Hen-Pecked Hou, who will toss you bottles of wine in battle to initiate a little drunken boxing, and Chai Ka, a young girl who transforms into a giant demon.



Set in a massive and lush world, the game offers some of the most beautiful levels ever seen



multitude of controls, you'll soon discover that the system is relatively easy to pick up but a bit trickier to master. Just bashing the light attack button may eventually win you your first few fights, but if you actually manage to get to grips with swapping styles, dodging, blocking and using the harmonic combos for maximum impact, combat becomes far more satisfying and you'll start to feel like a true kung fu master. The fluid animation of the characters really helps things along too, making you feel like you're right in the thick of the action.

There are a few niggles though. The game always defaults back to the last style used in battle once a fight begins (even if you've changed this in between). Plus, despite the richly designed environments, low-res textures still abound.

However, with a great story, tons of missions, beautifully rich settings, satisfying fighting and brilliant characterisation, all swaddled in over 20 hours of play, *Jade Empire* has transcended its Xbox roots to reincarnate itself as a high-kicking, epic RPG for PC. The chi is strong with this one. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Rich settings gloriously updated from Xbox
Sound Atmospheric sound effects, haunting soundtrack
Multiplayer Nope

- ✓ Lush environments
- ✓ Fast-paced and taxing fighting
- ✓ Great support cast and excellent dialogue
- ✓ Masses of content
- ✗ Fighting has some small niggles
- ✗ Still a two year-old Xbox conversion

89

Fists of fury



BATTLEFIELD 2142: NORTHERN STRIKE

Geordie bus drivers' union at it again?

DEVELOPER EA/DICE
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE battlefield.ea.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £5.99

System requirements **3**



EVEN THOUGH WE all know this expansion pack was probably a point on a marketing manager's graph of 'projections' and 'profit yields' before *Battlefield 2142* was even released, I have to admit that the quality of the content on offer is above cynical expectation – in fact, I'll come right out and say it: *Northern Strike* is a good expansion pack.

It's not great (let's not get carried away), and we hate seeing an excellent online shooter receive only these meagre content boosts (whatever happened to the proper expansions of old?). However, with three new maps, two new vehicles and one new game mode, *Northern Strike* is recommended for anybody who plays *Battlefield 2142* with some degree of regularity.

The maps are all snowbound, focusing on the frozen north of Europe. The Port Bavaria map, which features a series of Titan supply stations, and the



Bridge At Remagen map, which re-enacts the famous World War II battle only with futuristic tanks, are particularly excellent. The new vehicles are starkly dissimilar too, one a sprightly hover-buggy and the other a mobile fortress of an APC. The new game mode, Assault Lines, is a barely notable tweak of the current Conquest mode.

Finally, *Northern Strike* introduces a whole new tier of unlocks which become available in the core game, which is a bit of a kick in the balls for players who don't want to buy it, and a sneaky way of squeezing another six quid out of us. But hey, what can you do?

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE

65

Why-aye, it's OK



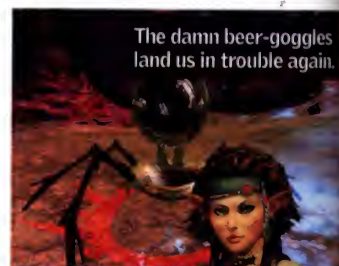
As exciting as they look, they're only diplomats.

Xethair the Despoiler
Lord of Infernus

Eznorax the Ashen Hand
Lord Magus



Never feed Will Porter after midnight...



The damn beer-goggles land us in trouble again.



VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES

Ed Zitron drops that zero and gets with the heroes...

DEVELOPER Sigil Games Online
PUBLISHER Sony Online Entertainment

WEBSITE
www.joinvanguard.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £29.99 (plus £9.49 a month subscription)

AT A GLANCE...

Overloaded yet underwhelming MMORPG slog requiring hours of dedication and a high resistance against boredom.

System requirements

5

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 95%

EVERQUEST II 95%

VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES 45%

FIVE YEARS IN the making, *Vanguard: Saga Of Heroes* is the brainchild of an A-Team of MMO developers, including some major players from the development team of former genre-king *EverQuest*. Sadly, somewhere along the line this baby was dropped on its head, leading to a hollow, mind-numbingly dull MMORPG grind that stretches the boundaries of good taste and sensible design decisions.

FOREVERQUEST

Vanguard has been promoted as a 'core' MMORPG, harking back to the days before *World Of Warcraft* and *Everquest II* 'mainstreamed' the industry. Cutting through the hype of both fanboys and PR-types, this is referring to the days before instancing, quick levelling and fast travel, which have apparently removed all sense of adventure from the genre.

The world of Telon is a nostalgic stab at the old-school *EverQuest* format, dropping

teleportation and fast-transport across a world crammed with content in favour of grand, meandering environs that lead more naturally to built-up areas. While in *EQ*'s case this style of gameplay was pursued in the innocent exploration of a new genre, *Vanguard*'s whimsical wandering feels synthetic when combined with its pragmatic quest-to-level progression.

In fact, the vast, unknown world that Sigil Games have created feels pointless when you witness quite how much of it is filled with repeating textures and the same handful of enemies. Soon enough you realise that *Vanguard*'s 'exploration' actually means a succession of 15-minute jaunts across endless vistas of angry flora and fauna. It's a recipe for disaster when combined with a vicious levelling curve somewhat reminiscent of the original *EverQuest*.

Worse still, the content is spread drastically thin across the three major continents. Having to provide hundreds of hours' worth of questing for 19 races has

clearly troubled the developers, and after your umpteenth 'kill X of this' and 'deliver this to here' quest you'll realise just how two-dimensional the game really is.

And all along, Sigil have forgotten to make it charming. *Vanguard* desperately wants to be a fantasy epic, but only succeeds in being shallow and uninteresting. The game makes you walk great distances to do things you can do in many other games, with little hope of an endearing storyline or character to lighten the mood. Yes Telon is big, but it lacks any of the innate charisma of *Azeroth* or *Norrath*, and it shows in every town, quest and NPC.

TRAGIC: THE GATHERING

The much-vaunted 'spheres' of crafting and diplomacy are an equal let-down. While the diplomacy card game is an interesting diversion, it all too quickly becomes repetitive beyond words. Crafting is worse still, hiding a hodgepodge of constant clicking behind a facade of three-

Racing fans will be stunned...

Diplomacy

Get your deck out and make some friends

Jade Goody found work quickly after her recent TV blunder.



Diplomacy is one of the few interesting new features that *Vanguard* offers. It allows you to follow several quest lines, advancing the story through games of cards that 'parley' with NPCs. Experienced card-battlers can activate city-wide buffs, such as tradeskill increases, or spawn certain merchants for limited time periods. With more development, it could have been an interesting alternative to combat, but at present is nothing more than a diversion.

Telon is big, but it lacks any of the innate charisma of Azeroth or Norrath, and it shows in every quest and NPC



stage forming and 'complications' that become tiresome far too quickly.

To top this off, as of going to press *Vanguard* veers between unstable and unplayable on many computers, even those that run *WOW* or *EQII* smoothly. The graphics are lush, but even on the 'highest performance' setting they can bring competent computers to a jerky, pitiful halt. With bugs galore and a stinking, stuttering engine, it becomes even harder to be positive about this game.

While taking inspiration from many of its peers, *Vanguard* fails to understand the keys to success. It's a classic case of quantity over quality, sporting so much repetition and needless grinding that it can hardly be called an adventure.

In a world of well-made, fun-packed MMORPGs like *Guild Wars* and *WOW*, *Vanguard* is in no way recommendable to anyone but masochists and those with more time and money than sense. Sadly, Sigil's vision is dead. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Ranging from gorgeous to gaudy**
Sound **Middling, cyclical music, atrocious voice-acting**
Multiplayer **That's what it is, yes**

- ✓ Graphics are good on the right system
- ✓ Diplomacy is reasonably fun
- ✗ Shockingly unstable at present
- ✗ Repetitive, unbelievably dull questing
- ✗ Charmless, barren world
- ✗ Hellish *EverQuest*-style levelling curve

45

Vanguard: Litany of Errors



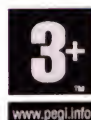
... and so will everybody else.

ManiaLinks
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www.tm-united.com



NADEO





Third-person shooting doesn't get much worse than this.

Each faction is superbly diverse.

Maelstrom has many great ideas, but fails to deliver.

MAELSTROM

Is a revolutionary RTS storm brewing, or is it just a load of hot air? *Martin Korda* wades in to find out...

DEVELOPER KDV Games
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE
www.codemasters.co.uk/
maelstrom
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



And don't even get us started on the interface...

AT A GLANCE...

An ambitious RTS packed with innovation, but marred by several annoying shortfalls. Shame.

System requirements

3

HOW IT STACKS

SUPREME COMMANDER 88%

GROUND CONTROL II 84%

MAELSTROM 67%

INNOVATION IS A funny old thing. Take *Maelstrom*. One glance at its list of features would be enough to have even the most hardened of cynics polishing a Classic Award in anticipation. But while it may be an RTS brimming with clever ideas, it fails to fulfil its potential on so many levels.

Set in the near future when corporations have all but overthrown the governments of the world, it's your mission – as the 'Remnants' of humanity and its armed forces – to thwart the armies of Tesco and Asda before they forcibly build express supermarkets on every nuked street corner. At least, that's roughly the gist of it...

Later on, an alien race turns up, which is when things really start to get interesting, but by that point, it's a case of too little, a little too late.

POOR EXECUTION

Masquerading as an impoverished man's *Ground Control II*, *Maelstrom* – like a child prodigy who turns to booze at the age of 12 – throws away much of its potential on a collection of misjudged and sub-standard choices. These include

an infuriatingly clumsy interface, along with poor camera controls compounded by a lack of building transparency – often leaving your troops out of sight at key moments. Couple this with brain-jarringly annoying incidental troop dialogue, and one of the most bizarre third-person shooter sections we've ever seen, in which you control a hero unit and fire what can only be described as a pea shooter at enemies who never miss their target. All of which is criminal when you consider just how much potential this game has.

However, after a tedious start, you do slowly start to uncover a multitude of quality features, including many great terrain and weather-altering options, which imbue the game with a solid spine of originality. There's also a myriad of superbly diverse vehicles, destructible surroundings (admittedly with somewhat exaggerated physics), quality day/night cycles and some top-notch hero abilities.

Maelstrom is certainly interesting, but it just lacks that magic spark needed to transform a collection of ingenious ideas into a thrilling RTS experience. Innovative? Certainly. Thrilling and essential? Not quite. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Adequate
Sound Annoying
Multiplayer Skirmish with various victory conditions

- ✓ Plenty of innovation
- ✓ Huge unit and faction diversity
- ✓ Great use of terrain and elements
- ✗ Atrocious interface
- ✗ Laughable third-person shooter features
- ✗ Too many missions feel overly flat

67

Ambitious but flawed

Friday 9th March 2007



SAM & MAX: EPISODE 3 - THE MOLE, THE MOB AND THE MEATBALL

Still laughing, just
not quite as hard

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE www.telltalegames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$8.95/£5 per episode
(\$34.95/£19 for all six)

System requirements 1

NOW THAT WE'RE on the third episode, we're not allowed to be excited by the return of point-and-click's finest. The rainbow of nostalgic thrill has been bleached by the glare of recent enjoyment, and only a creamy, demanding expectation remains. Luckily, *Episode 3: The Mole, The Mob And The Meatball* follows the same strong S&M formula. Perhaps too tightly, but onto that later.

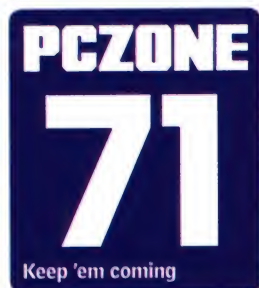
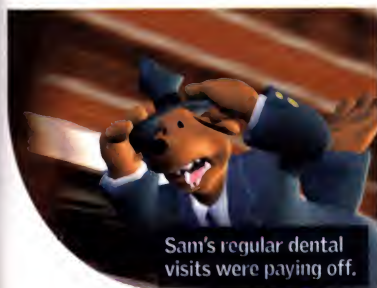
The world is the same again, but also different again; while your reaction to the Not'cho's Nachos stand remains unchanged ("They're mine - not'chos"), Sybil has become a professional witness and Jimmy The Rat has set up stall as a fence. All of

this becomes unavoidably relevant as the plot of mafia and stolen goods unfolds. There's the complete range of quality one-liners you'd expect: "Hit him where it hurts - in the mother"; and: "The market is bearish for crazy fake French dollars." It's all there, and it's as warm, witty and fun to play as any of the preceding chapters.

On the other hand, it's the shortest and easiest yet, with the episodic formula's skeleton (office/street intro, on-location puzzle, three-pronged task, conclusion) showing more obviously through the tighter, more linear flesh. And you're left slightly hungry, and wondering whether the fridge magnet solution makes logical sense. And, well, why that playing card was just lying around where it was.

The middle episodes are difficult - having set the scene, it's too soon in the six-parter to unravel everything into the chaos we'll eventually demand. *Episode 3* might have all the appetite suppression of a fun-size Milky Way, but it's still two hours of your life you'll be happy you spent away from other people.

Jon Blyth



"Genuinely impressive stuff."
"Remarkably speedy and shiny."

PCZONE

"Excellently berserk racing game."

PCGAMER

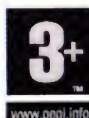
"Works a treat."
PCFormat

"It's hard to imagine a better
set of rules for the road."

EDGE



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NADEO



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ISSUE 14 MARCH 2007 £3.99

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Sonic Wii Review!

The supersonic hedgehog touches down on planet Wii. **Final verdict** inside!

Exclusive 2

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Like Animal Crossing? Then you'll love this amazing new life sim for **Wii** and **DS**!



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World Exclusive!

The Sims are coming...
Their Wii debut revealed!

Nintendo®

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE

New Issue Out Now

UFO: AFTERLIGHT

As it turns out, men really are from Mars...

DEVELOPER ALTAR Games

PUBLISHER Cenega

WEBSITE

www.ufo-afterlight.com

ETA Out now

PRICE £29.99

System requirements **2**



HUMANS VS ALIENS. If anything from videogames is to be believed, then it's the inevitable struggle of the future. In this third instalment of the *UFO* series, mankind's already lost the battle for planet Earth and has been shipped off by the conquering aliens to a lonely crater on Mars instead.

Newcomers will be totally bewildered by *Afterlight's* mix of turn-based strategy and micro-management. If you've never tested the waters of the series before, it can be a bit like trying to gouge your eye out with a slippery spoon – painful, bloody tough and you're positive there's a much better way to get the job done.

From the main menu, there's an overwhelming mass of options available,



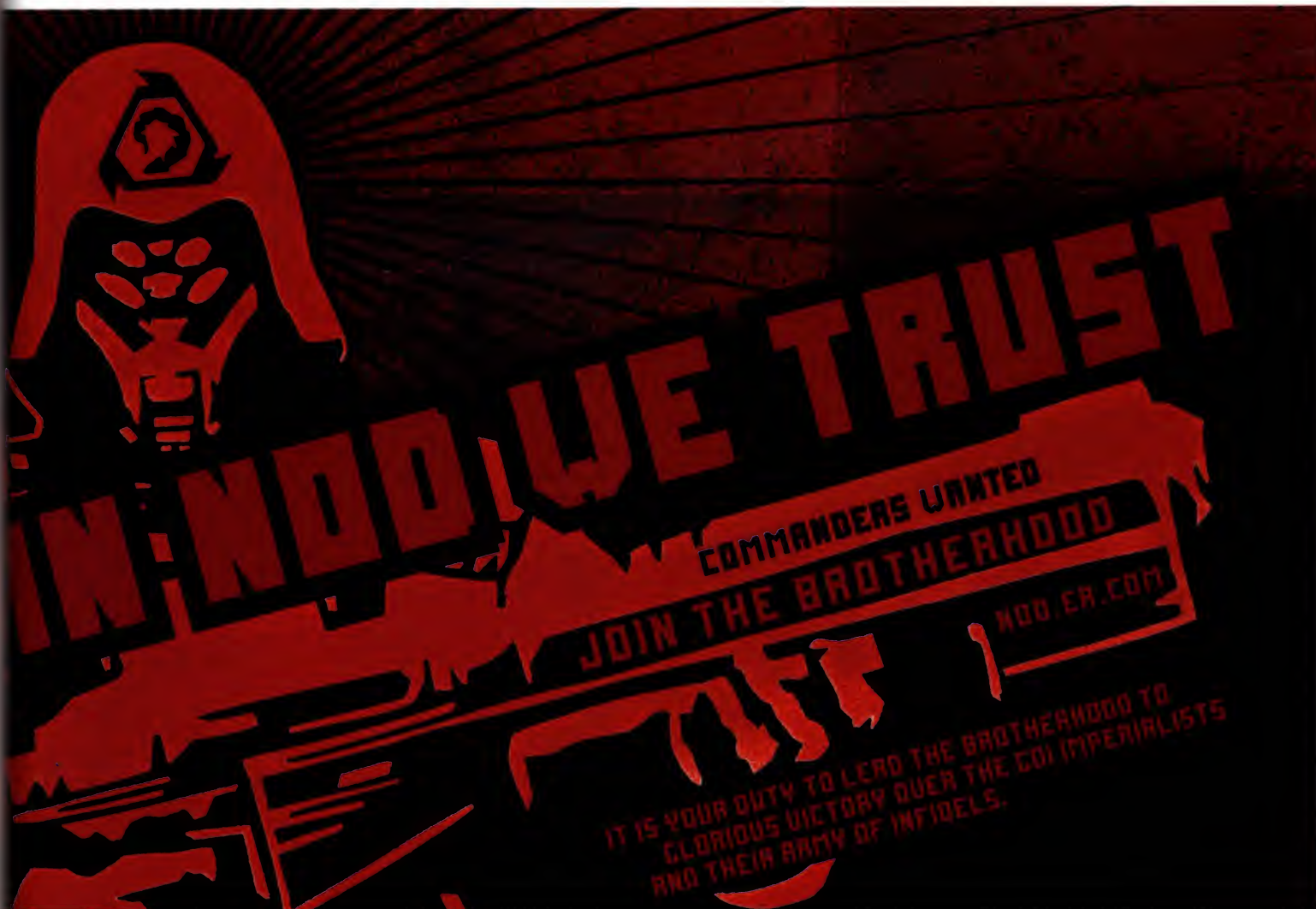
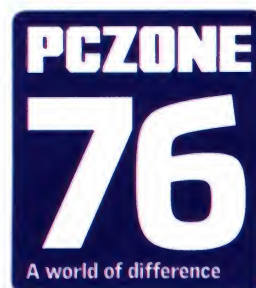
from training characters to building up your base. Once you've finished clicking around in these, the world map allows you to send out your drones to colonise the planet and search out a conflict to send your team in to do battle.

On the combat screen, the graphics are a bit sparse and the turn-based combat won't be to everyone's tastes.

Making matters worse is the diabolical camera which seems to have a mind of its own and is the most frustrating one I've ever had to deal with.

Despite all this, underneath lies a strangely compelling game which, given a little time, will have you hooked. Fans of the series are bound to love it and if you have enough patience, you too might uncover the goeey warmth at the heart of this initially cold title.

Suzy Wallace



You won't find any of these indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

indiezone



Given the choice of going to war or playing minigolf, *Martin Korda* would plump for the latter. Less shouting and that

INDIEZONE
GAME OF THE MONTH

MINIGOLF MANIA

DEVELOPER Top Meadow WEBSITE www.topm.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

ALONG WITH FISH and chips, avoiding used syringes and pissing your cash away on the slots, minigolf is one of the staple activities of spending a day by the seaside. However, playing it at home on your PC rarely manages to recreate the same levels of entertainment.

Minigolf Mania is the exception to this rule (which I made up just now), as it's every bit as fun as having your face lashed by sea spray while attempting to time a perfect shot through a rotating windmill on a hot summer's day.

Simply yet pleasantly presented with some top-notch ball physics, *Minigolf Mania* oozes entertainment and quality from every hole. Each course is

imaginatively designed and augmented by some superb power-ups including springs, mini-trampolines and boosters that propel your ball over obstacles. There's even a collection of superpower balls that further enhance your putting options.

With its simple-to-use interface and fittingly zany musical score, *Minigolf Mania* proves to be a hugely entertaining way to sink some balls from the comfort of your own home. Just scatter a few used condoms around your monitor while chomping on some battered hake and you'll feel right at home.

PCZONE
77

Hole 4
Par 2



These rotating Booster Beams require perfect timing.



Mind the trees!

Hands off our resources.

WAR ON FOLVOS

DEVELOPER Lonely Troops WEBSITE www.lonelytroops.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

THE TURN-BASED strategy genre has been suffering these past few years. It seems not many developers are keen to spend their time crafting

these wonderfully tactical games anymore. Which makes it all the more satisfying when a game like *War On Folvos* comes along and reminds us all just how much fun turn-based strategy gaming can be.

As its title subtly suggests, the game is set on the planet Folvos and

tasks you with leading a band of rebels against an empire intent on stealing all of your planet's resources.

Granted, the graphics are far from impressive, but what *War On Folvos* lacks in the visual stakes, it more than makes up for with its highly strategic levels, crisp enemy AI and a rousing soundtrack.

A few minor issues such as a lack of an undo move option and a few clumsy text entries prevent it from scoring higher, but as far as indie turn-based strategy games go, *War On Folvos* is one of the best around, just falling short of the excellent *Styrtag*.

PCZONE
71

XAVENGER

DEVELOPER Division studios WEBSITE www.divisionstudios.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)

AH, TOP-DOWN 2D sci-fi blasters. Where would Indie Zone be without them? Aliens invading Earth intent on wiping out humanity. Humanity striking back. Aliens running back home. Humanity running after aliens intent on wiping out alien race. Lone hero (you) fighting your way through droves of enemies while opening doors, solving puzzles, tackling big bosses and pummeling the fire button.

So, what sets *XAvenger* apart from the myriad of other

identikit 2D shooters out there? Well, not much, but that's not to say it doesn't do what it does competently. The levels are engaging and challenging, packed with varied enemies, traps and puzzles – but it's true there's nothing here you haven't seen before.

However, if a top-down shooter is what you're after, then *XAvenger* is certainly one of the better ones out there to fire up.

PCZONE
59



Fire, fire, fire. Repeat.



Nowhere to run.



XAvenger has its fair share of humongous bosses.

KINGDOM ELEMENTAL

DEV Chronic Logic/Liberation Games WEB www.chroniclogic.com PRICE \$19.95 (£11)



Chaaaaaaaaaaaaaarge!

Everybody was kung-fu fighting. Or similar.

FUNNIEST! TUTORIAL! EVER!

If you get the chance, you really have to check it out. In fact, it's so entertaining that it's almost worth the entry fee alone. But not quite...

See, the problem with *Kingdom Elemental* – a third-person real-time tactical combat game – is that despite some slick presentation and a solid core concept, it's also extremely flawed.

Starting with just a couple of warriors, you must defeat waves of enemies in order to accumulate stacks of gold (with which to buy more units) and Unlock Points. The latter gives you access to a multitude of new melee, ranged and magical units, each with its

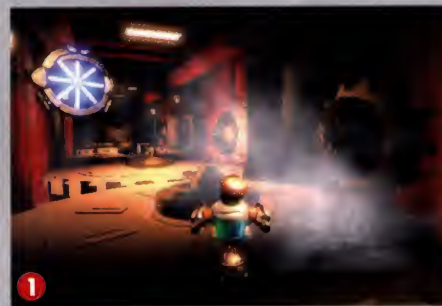
own collection of special abilities.

However, with the AI usually intent on chasing after your slowest and most vulnerable units regardless of how much you try to stop them, there's often little point buying anything other than durable and agile melee warriors.

Kingdom Elemental is also monumentally difficult, and it doesn't take long for you to start questioning whether it's all worth the effort. There's certainly some promise here, but in its current guise, *Kingdom Elemental* is far too frustrating to recommend.

PCZONE
55

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed Issue 177

This stunning third-person action-puzzle about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest-scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.



2

NAKED WAR

www.zee-3.com | Reviewed Issue 177

A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



3

MORNING'S WRATH

www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed Issue 163

A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



4

NEW STAR SOCCER 3

www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed Issue 164

This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensi Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience currently available.



5

LUGARU: THE RABBIT'S FOOT

www.wolfire.com | Reviewed Issue 162

An ambitious and extremely entertaining third-person action/adventure in which you play a killer rabbit bent on revenge after his entire family is murdered. Inspired stuff.

BUDGET

Three beers or a budget game?

**BUDGET
GAME
OF THE
MONTH**

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

BROTHERS IN ARMS – the franchise built up as the biggest of hitters but undermined by its snug envelopment in Xbox design and a tactical mind too bent on flanking to appease the average blood-hungry joe. Despite all that though, I'm firm in the belief that *Earned In Blood* is a very good game, if somewhat deteriorating with age these days.

It's still tightly scripted, challenging and satisfying to play, but it confuses people since it isn't a conventional action game. If anything, it's a high-

tension WWII puzzler – a class that you don't get too many to in the average metric kilogram. The American flag-waving gets on your wick a little, but for sheer adrenalin-pumpage, being the last standing man in your squad aiming a bazooka against one of the game's fearsome tanks is an emotion that can't be beat. I still love ya Gearbox, c'mere and give us a hug...

Will Porter

**PCZONE
81**



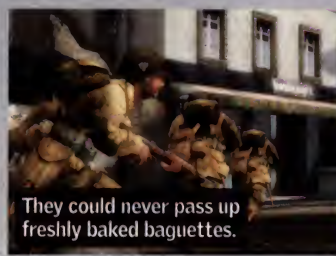
"You got any Ibuprofen? I've got a splitting headache."



Colin's latest flatulent outburst was one too many.



Loading in front of an open window. Smart.



They could never pass up freshly baked baguettes.

**THIS
MONTH
PCZONE
SAVED MONEY BY...**

Clare buying cheap champagne instead of Bollinger:
Saving: £15



Steve not getting his hair cut:
Saving: £8



Log not joining the gym for another month:
Saving: £59



SONIC RIDERS

PUBLISHER GSP WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £9.99

IF SONIC WERE a ventriloquist's dummy, he wouldn't want to come out of his chest. He'd be shy, beaten and unwilling to star in another over-spiced, under-playable iteration of his glorious 2D days. But the crowds come, and the unfeeling ventriloquist pulls him out yet again, and this time he's been dropped on a futuristic hoverboard. Sonic's fast, right? Well just imagine how fast he'd be, if he was, erm, standing still – on a hoverboard!

The game is a basic racer – hit go-faster areas, find shortcuts, collect rings for fairly meaningless Extreme Gear. It's so basic, *Sonic Riders* feels like nothing more than an over-padded mini-game, and the frustration of the control, response and the sense of luck that infects the results has been carried over perfectly from the console versions.

And no, you didn't miss the main review – this game went straight to budget for a reason.

Jon Blyth

**PCZONE
46**



"I really am..."

"...Hating every minute."

RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE www.focusmm.co.uk PRICE £999

FANS OF TOM Clancy – or anyone who's quite happy to spend several hours discussing the pros and cons of a 9mm pistol in a hostage situation – will probably be fans of this latest iteration before they've even got it out of the box. But what about the rest of us?

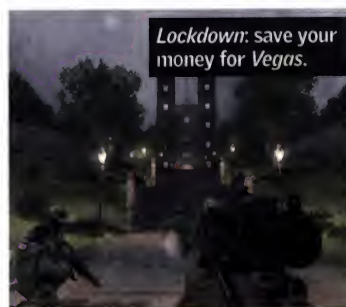
As expected, there's enough weaponry to keep the Middle East crisis well-stocked for at least another five years. However, thanks to the multi-platform development, things were never looking too hot on the PC version. Despite the control system working well with some satisfying shooting, multiplayer and a decent co-op mode too, things are let down by that old weak point, your team-mates.

On top of that, I'm fairly sure the world's most advanced military forces don't go round emptying bullets into people who just stand there staring. Combine that with some tedious level

design, and you're much better off saving your pennies for the newer and vastly superior *Rainbow Six: Vegas*.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
59



ROME: TOTAL WAR – ALEXANDER

PUBLISHER GSP White Label WEBSITE www.gspsoftware.co.uk PRICE £999

THE GREAT THING about budget titles is that you can pick up entire games for little more than the price of a round. However, *Alexander's* an expansion and despite it being an excellent but tough addition to *Rome: Total War*, I have a problem with the price. Just under a tenner may sound good, but when you realise that the game was first available to download for a measly £8.50, the

appeal of this soon starts to wane.

Even worse comes when you venture onto the *Total War* site and discover it's still available for download at that price. *Alexander* may have been a strategic genius, but this pricing deserves a military coup. Grab it online and save your pounds.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE
79



And the rest...

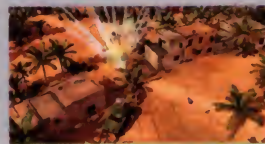
Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



ZOO EMPIRE
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

If you're under the age of ten and enjoy caring for virtual animals trapped in the cages of a zoo management sim, this is for you. For the rest of us who only go to the zoo to see monkeys throwing poo, avoid this like a rabid warthog.

PCZONE
42



CODENAME PANZERS: PHASE 2
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

This WWII RTS may not offer much new in the way of features, and certainly lags way behind the new standard set by *Company Of Heroes*, but there's pretty graphics, a heavy emphasis on action and the chance to kill some Nazis – bonus.

PCZONE
61



CHROME SPECFORCE
£4.99, GSP WHITE LABEL RELOAD

More of a reshuffle of the original than a new game, *Specforce* focuses on the few good bits found in the first title. Sadly, the bad bits are here too, so unless you're a fan of rubbish interiors, below par AI and monotonous gameplay, stick to *Far Cry*.

PCZONE
59

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



1
FAR CRY

£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2
THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC

Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3
THE MOVIES

£9.99, ACTIVISION BEST OF RANGE

A great movie-studio management title that transcends the genre by also offering a raft of brilliant film-making tools. Home-made machinima ahoy!



4
ROME: TOTAL WAR
£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL

Long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW's* glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



5
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC

A flawed masterpiece, *Deadly Shadows* may have been compromised by its dual-development, but for suspense and level design, it can't be faulted.

BUYER'S GUIDE

The bestest games your money can buy...



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'K'

- 1 **KLINGON: HONOUR GUARD**
(ISSUE 68)
- 2 **KING'S QUEST VII**
(ISSUE 24)
- 3 **KINGPIN: A LIFE OF CRIME**
(ISSUE 77)
- 4 **KING'S QUEST VI**
(ISSUE 7)
- 5 **KING'S QUEST VIII: MASK OF ETERNITY**
(ISSUE 71)



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES WITH 'ASS' IN THE TITLE

- 1 **ASSASSIN'S CREED**
(DOUBLE POINTS! ISSUE N/A)
- 2 **HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN**
(ISSUE 121)
- 3 **AUTO ASSAULT**
(ISSUE 169)
- 4 **MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT**
(ISSUE 112)
- 5 **TORIN'S PASSAGE**
(ISSUE 36)



PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES WITH 'TIT' IN THE TITLE

- 1 **TITAN QUEST**
(ISSUE 170)
- 2 **AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS**
(ISSUE 136)
- 3 **STARSHIP TITANIC**
(ISSUE 63)
- 4 **TITANS OF STEEL: WARRING SUNS**
(ISSUE 135)
- 5 **TITLE BOUT CHAMPIONSHIP BOXER**
(ISSUE 163)



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 PCZ Issue: 148 - 97%

Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2 PCZ Issue: 157 - 94%

If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.



FAR CRY PCZ Issue: 140 - 93%

In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.



HL2: EPISODE ONE PCZ Issue: 170 - 91%

Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2 PCZ Issue: 162 - 91%

Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R. PCZ Issue: 160 - 90%

With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Revenge* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



BATTLEFIELD 2142 PCZ Issue: 174 - 86%

Adding bucketfuls of novelty mechanical future-warfare, *BF2142* pushes the *BF* formula ever closer to perfection with its exciting new game mode - despite not being revolutionary by its own merits.

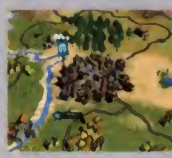
Strategy

Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%

The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



CIVILIZATION IV PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%

A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%

A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%

Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH PCZ Issue: 149 - 91%

Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II PCZ Issue: 144 - 90%

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumble of tanks never so worrying.



WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF DARK CRUSADE PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%

Proving that not all strategy titles have to be based upon historical or fantasy settings, this standalone sci-fi expansion offers tons of blood-spattered and frenetic action - no 12-sided die required.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%

The chosen poison for certain PCZ staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS PCZ Issue: 155 - 92%

To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this - a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty, freeform and hilarious - *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.



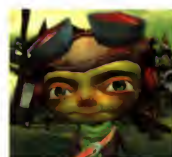
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY PCZ Issue 154 - 91%

A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercenaries multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%

Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%

Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%

We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES PCZ Issue: 164 - 86%

The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II

PCZ Issue: 150 - 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW's* *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS

PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy - it's up to you.



CITY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 150 - 86%
Nothing beats the feeling of spandex and fire-beams shooting from your eyes. This super-powered MMO lets you live all those heroic dreams to the full. Nietzsche would have a field day.

Simulation

Must buy!



X3: REUNION

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X

PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER

PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE

PCZ Issue: 158 - 82%
An example of fanbase enthusiasm saving a once-dead series, *Falcon 4.0* lives on thanks to the dedication of its players. The best modern-day fighter sim on the market.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2

PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



GT LEGENDS

PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED

PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

PCZ Issue: 163 - 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

PCZ Issue: 165 - 85%
If you're into cars, this is about as essential as oxygen. With a huge collection of 35 motorsport genres, a great damage engine and realistic tracks, there's plenty of mileage in this superb racer.

God games

Must buy!



THE MOVIES

PCZ Issue: 162 - 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2

PCZ Issue: 161 - 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



BLACK & WHITE

PCZ Issue: 150 - 90%
Lionhead's controversial vision brought out your good/bad side and featured an ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and great AI. It can now be yours for a mere fiver, making it a god among mortals.



EVIL GENIUS

PCZ Issue: 147 - 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

PCZ Issue: 135 - 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport

Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007

PCZ Issue: 175 - 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

PCZ Issue: 175 - 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* - just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006

PCZ Issue: 161 - 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07

PCZ Issue: 174 - 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. PES-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06

PCZ Issue: 160 - 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this 06 incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent ball-out fun for the whole family.

Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PCZ Issue: 137 - 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX

PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

PCZ Issue: 118 - 91%
It may not have the depth of *Fallout*, but the customisation options in this are so extensive that it's been granted a very long life. Still a wonderfully immersive game.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Rest Of Q1

BRIAN LARA INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007
COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS
DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES
GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2
HOSPITAL TYCOON
INFERNAL
JADE EMPIRE
LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR
PENUMBRA: OVERTURE
SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL
SILENT HUNTER IV: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
SILVERFALL
SPELLFORCE 2: DRAGON STORM
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
THEY HUNGER: LOST SOULS
TITAN QUEST: IMMORTAL THRONE
TRACKMANIA UNITED
VIRTUA TENNIS 3

CODEMASTERS
EA
UBISOFT
UBISOFT
CODEMASTERS
PLAYLOGIC
2K GAMES
CODEMASTERS
LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT
TBA
UBISOFT
DEEP SILVER
JOWOOD
THQ
VALVE
THQ
ASCARON
SEGA

Q2

ASSASSIN'S CREED
BIOSHOCK
BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
CRYSIS
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION - SHIVERING ISLES
HELLGATE: LONDON
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN
LEFT 4 DEAD
OVERLORD
STRANGLEHOLD
TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY

UBISOFT
2K GAMES
UBISOFT
CODEMASTERS
EA
2K GAMES
EA
EIDOS
VALVE
CODEMASTERS
MIDWAY
EIDOS

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PCZONE

HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Vapid Vista

JAY MUNRO AT Microsoft recently posted an entry to his blog. It was a short list of Vista features, each of which represented something so remarkable about his employer's new operating system that existing Windows users sampling any one of them would immediately want to upgrade.

The first entry on his list was Internet Explorer, an identical version of which has been available to XP users for about a year. "You can search the Web without having to open a webpage," he enthused.

The next entry was the new Sidebar feature, or just plain widgets to everyone else. A less demanding, multi-platform widget engine remains a free download from the Yahoo! site.

Munro then listed the Aero interface, which does indeed make XP feel dated, but like animated menus, translucent windows and exotic screensavers, it's something that eats resources for no worthwhile cause and whose features you will gradually disable over time.

Mahjongg Titans? You must be joking. Start Menu Search and Control Panel Search? Better, but only useful because Microsoft got the Start Menu and Control Panel so wrong initially. Last, Munro lists the Windows Photo Gallery, an addition which lets you see all the pictures on your computer! Awesome!

When the full version of Vista costs more than £350, is it any wonder many of us are already looking forward to its replacement?

Wandy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

EASY UPGRADE

Microsoft announcement followed by workaround is good news...

YOU CAN'T PERFORM a clean installation with an upgrade version of Vista. Instead, you'll first need to install a prior version of Windows and then make the upgrade.

Microsoft's announcement infuriated many users who feared their Vista upgrades would be rendered useless in the event their hard drive failed, or they moved their system to new hardware.

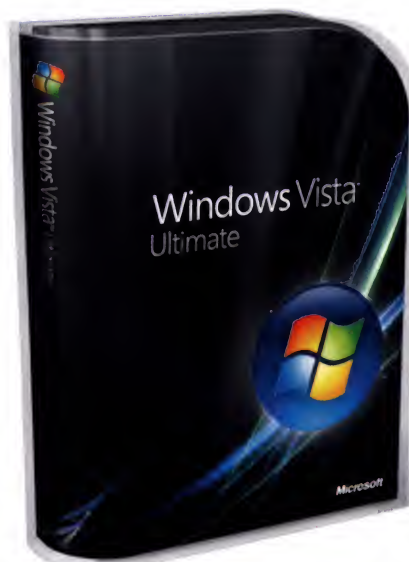
But a workaround has made its way onto the Internet, meaning that you don't have to have an existing Windows on your PC to install Vista Upgrade version. It means you can save yourselves the expense of the full version.

1. Boot from your Vista Upgrade DVD.
2. When prompted, leave your product key blank and click Next. This installs Vista as a 30-day trial.
3. Select the edition of Vista which you

have purchased and continue setup.

4. Once setup has finished and you're at the Windows desktop, run the install program again.
5. Enter your key when prompted.
6. When asked whether to perform an Upgrade or Custom install, choose the latter to perform a clean install of Vista.
7. Once setup has completed again, you will be able to activate normally. You should also delete the Windows.old directory which contains the first Vista install.

The workaround might seem long, but it's certainly quicker than installing Windows XP.



NEWS ROUND-UP

Peeved GeForce owners have set up a new website to publicise the fact that their G80-based hardware is incompatible with Vista, something even my mother knows. They want NVIDIA to respond publicly and apologise for their predicament, to provide anticipated dates for release of standard drivers, to offer a token gesture (such as a voucher), and perhaps most obviously to stop producing boxes which state that the hardware is ready for Vista. www.nvidia.classaction.org

This bit of the page is usually reserved for talk of the long-awaited Radeon R600 line-up, and this month I can report that a working version of the G80's rival has been demonstrated to the people who will build it in all its various versions. They were shown a card which should give the GeForce 8800 a run for its money. It bloody needs to. www.amd.com

FLOPPY TOILETTE

They were a bit crap, weren't they?

DSG INTERNATIONAL, the people behind Dixons, Currys and PC World, are no longer replenishing stocks of floppy disks because nobody's buying them any more.

If you can remember the number of floppies strapped into each retail box of *Doom*, like me you will feel a little sad that something so symbolic of a misspent youth

has just been dragged and dropped into the recycle bin.

They were rubbish, of course, and should have been flushed away years ago, but only recently have we had removable storage alternatives for less than a fiver. Goodbye then, crap and erratic old friend...

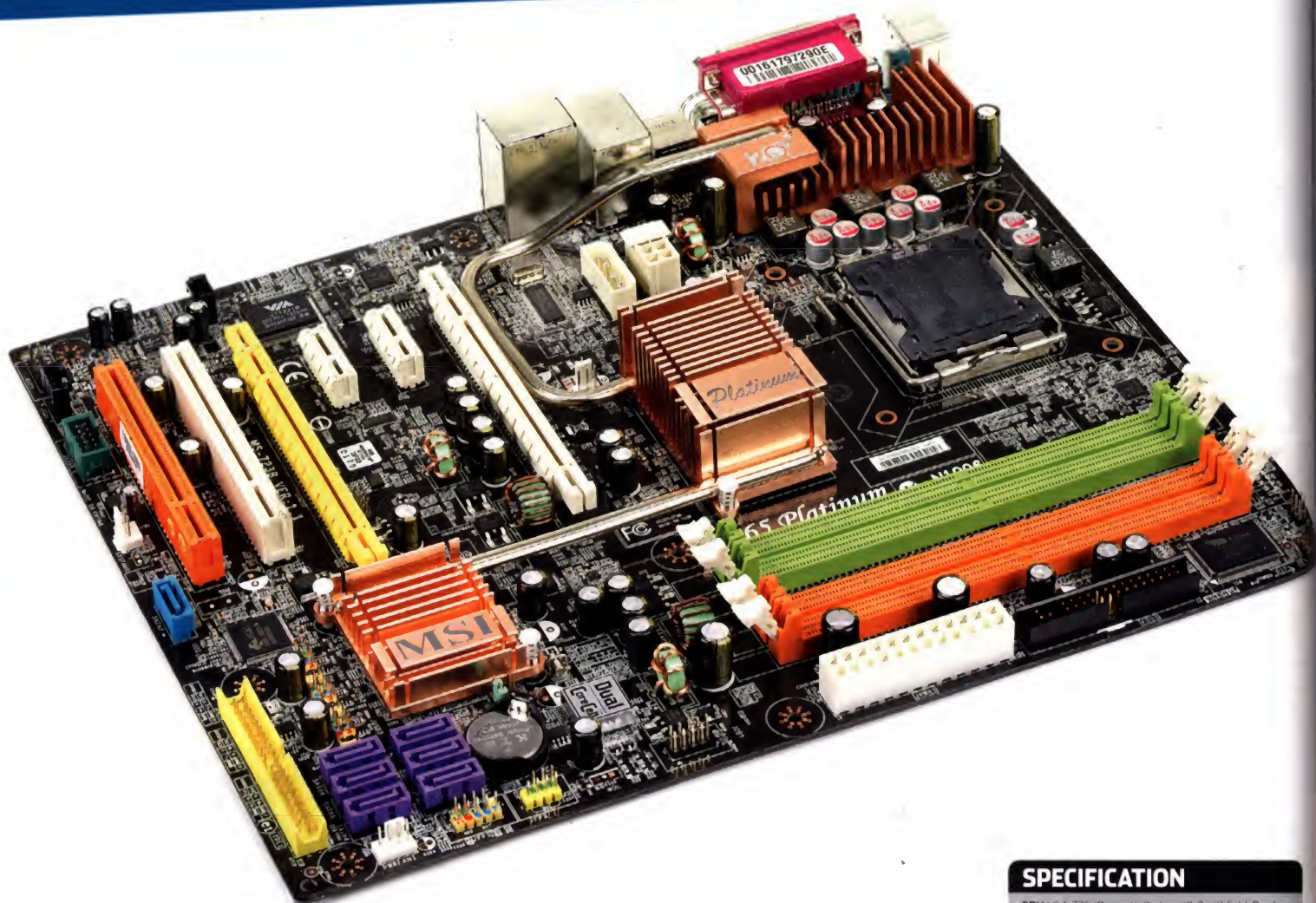


Slow, unreliable and unable to store anything worthwhile.

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

PRESCOTT: A type of CPU which will sleep with your graphics card, try to build a casino on your motherboard and then punch members of the public.
REALTEK: The rival company of Madguptek (whose main products include the Flibberty Gibberty Capacitor and the 5.1 Hydrofoil Speakers). **MSI:** The MFI of the computer hardware world, with the 'S' standing for 'super hardware' instead of 'furniture', probably. **16+4 ATI CROSSFIRE:** That'll be 20 ATI CrossFire, surely? **ERGOMEDIA:** If keyboards and chairs were so badly designed to begin with, where are the hordes of crippled nerds from the '80s?



P965 PLATINUM

PRICE £88 MANUFACTURER MSI WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

EVER WONDERED WHAT MSI'S mid-money P965 Platinum might look like were it ambushed by the presenters of *What Not To Wear*? Gone are those oh-so-frumpy passive cooling elements, now replaced by an attractive heatpipe arrangement connecting Intel's ICH8R Southbridge and P965 Northbridge.

Given that the board's previous version was capable of delivering class-leading results without the need for air being blown over its privates, the only reason to have tubes snaking about the place is that they mimic the appearance of rivals and are more photogenic than rattly old sinks. A shame, then, that the tarted-up Platinum retains its predecessor's jumble of coloured plastics.

The two memory banks (supporting a total of 8GB DDRII 533/667 or 4GB DDRII 800) are dipped in green and

orange powder paint. The first of seven SATA II connectors is cyan while the remainder are purple. The principal x16 PCI-Express slot is white, whereas its x4 partner and EIDE trough are the same shade of English mustard. It seems as though it was laid out by a committee of designers, none of whom communicated with one another because they were all under five.

CROSS-EYED

Then again, a child could also build a machine around it. Despite the manual annoying me by having no index and a tightly-wound spine that slapped the pages shut each time I let go, it's richly detailed with photos and information, and makes the Platinum perfect if you're assembling your very first PC. Add in a sub-£100 price tag, spacious layout and safety-net features – such as automatic recovery from ham-fisted

BIOS tweaks – and what you have is the ideal starter platform.

Only there are some confusions. MSI sent out a release last year proclaiming that their 'pioneering R&D' and 'continuous innovation' had made the Platinum the first P965 product to support 16+4 ATI CrossFire. However, there's no mention of CrossFire either on the company website nor in the documentation (although the user manual does state that the two x1 PCI-Express cards are disabled when the x4 slot is populated, so it's pointless anyway).

And what of Quad Core? Once again, MSI press documents detail how the P965 Platinum supports the QX6700 – there's even a natty 'Quad Core Ready' graphic to accompany the announcement – and yet there's nothing on the Web or on the packaging to suggest this is the case. Such disparity will only deter potential buyers.

SPECIFICATION

CPU LGA 775 (Prescott, Cedar mill, Smithfield, Presler, Core 2 Duo) **Chipset** P965 NB, ICH8R SB **Memory** DDR2 800/667/533 8GB Max (DDR2 800 4GB) **Expansion** 1 x PCI-E x16, 1 x PCI-E x4, 2 x PCI-E x1, 2 x PCI **Audio** Realtek ALC883 (7.1) **Internally** 3 x USB (6 ports), 1 x FDD, 1 x IDE (4 devices), 7 x SATA, 1 x FireWire **Externally** PS/2 keyboard and mouse, 1 x Serial, 1 x Parallel, 1 x LAN, 4 x USB **Warranty** 36 months

Benchmarks against rivals are predictably even, and even where differences exist you'd never notice them. So why worry? At launch, the Platinum was widely heralded as the fastest of its type, but what really made the board a best-seller was its decent bundle, overclocking features (and utilities to help newbies take advantage of them) – and of course, its price.

If MSI can keep the damage somewhere between £85 and £95, they're sure to have another winner on their hands.

PCZONE
88

HS-04U

PRICE £23 MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk

EVER FANCIED ENJOYING your games in super 3D surround sound, minus the multiple speakers and tripping over wires?

Then you've probably researched the Razer Barracuda gaming headset (issue 176, 79%) and its Zalman ZM-RS6F equivalent, and have come to the conclusion that neither are worth the effort. And you'd be right.

The problem is that, once you've sat in the middle of a proper audio solution – perhaps you have Logitech's Z-5500 Digital, or have splashed out on cinema gear for your lounge – and have had your senses put in a spin by a tsunami of sound, anything which claims to replicate the experience using Windows utilities and a £23 pair of headphones can only be a disappointment.

And so it proves with the Genius HS-04Us. While the virtual surround effects are passable, the comfort levels reasonable and the noise-cancelling microphone actually quite good, the sound

quality is way below par. I do understand that price is a factor here, and that to get the sound I want I'm going to have to thumb an Audio-Technica, Beyerdynamic or Grado catalogue. But I do believe that any product bearing something as alluring as a Dolby logo needs to attain the standards of the Dolby name. And the HS-04Us don't.

In addition, it was a major ache getting them to play ball. The inline volume control never worked, and the supplied Xear 3D software installed on precisely none of my PCs and I had to borrow a friend's laptop instead. Consider yourself warned.



ERGOMEDIA 500

PRICE £TBA MANUFACTURER Genius WEBSITE geniusnet.co.uk

THE ERGOMEDIA 500 APES the Belkin Nostromo SpeedPad n52 and Saitek Pro Gamer in being less than entirely useful.

The problem should be obvious. You still need a keyboard to type messages or to answer X-Fire pop-ups, and you still

need one to do basic tasks like join a game (how else do you enter IP addresses?) and to drop out when your mum calls you down for dinner (where's ESC?).

So these 'command units' must sit alongside the hardware you're certain to have already, cluttering up your desk and demanding that you push things about to make room. And honestly, they don't make you play better.

While the ErgoMedia 500 is beautifully made, elegantly shaped and well intentioned, all it's doing is duplicating portions of a control system that's already second-nature to every gamer, and in so doing is making the whole business rather complicated.



DEATHADDER

PRICE £44 MANUFACTURER Razer WEBSITE razerzone.com

BEARING AN UNCANNY resemblance to Microsoft's Habu gaming rodent, the DeathAdder is nicer to look at and better to use.

The Razer logo on its rear end throbs in a fetching purplish-blue, and the wheel is lit with the same colour. It's all rather seductive.

Unlike the Habu, the DeathAdder's top section is of one piece and the two main buttons have an effortless click to them. It's for righties only, which means the lefties among you won't be able to enjoy Razer's amazing optical engine: effortlessly accurate and infrared. So there's no annoying red glow seeping out from underneath.

All the buttons on the DeathAdder are programmable through a control panel which also provides access to a wide array of sensitivity controls. Stick to the default 1GHz polling rate and to 1,800 dpi and you'll not go wrong. A pity it's so expensive.



HOW TO... UPGRADE TO VISTA ULTIMATE FOR £500

Need:

Existing PC, Vista Ultimate edition, a monkey

Time:

5 hours

Difficulty level:



Phil Wand

Deep Blue

Medium doofus

Big Brother contestant

Jamie Sefton

Confused about what you might need to run Windows Vista Ultimate edition at full pelt? *Phil Wand* has the answers...

YOU KNOW, IT used to be just games that made you lust after high-spec hardware. Three years ago, teaser *Far Cry* screenshots and a subsequent demo had everyone smashing their piggy banks and hunting around for loose change down the back of the sofa. That powder-blue sea, those hot white sands... The CryEngine made you want to carry your PC down to the charity store and upgrade to a brand-new one.

Now Vista is muscling in on those same desires. That sexy new interface, those inviting new features... However, you'll need more oomph if you're going to get the most out of Microsoft's latest Windows.

How much do you need to spend? For the princely sum of £500, you can build yourself a superb system capable of showing off the new operating system with all the candy your eyes can handle...

01 Intel Core 2 Duo E6300

The E6300 is the processor of the moment. Even if you're the Duke of Westminster, there's little point going for any other Conroe – getting this 'starter' model not only means you save money now, you also lose less when you come to replace it. And should you have the inclination, you can overclock the thing into next week.

But keep things simple. Buy the boxed (ie retail, not OEM) version of the E6300 and you'll have Intel's revised fan-heatsink to partner your processor. It includes a new type of thermal compound and is virtually silent at idle, meaning that unlike its Pentium predecessor you shouldn't throw it straight in the bin.



02 ASRock ConRoeXFire-eSATA2

Look no further than ASRock's ConRoeXFire-eSATA2 from the Buyer's Guide. It's the most sensible board for your Core 2 Duo, because while you could save yourself a score by going for the ConRoe945PL-GLAN or 775Dual-VISTA, the former mobo only supports Allendale chips (ie those with an 800MHz bus), and the latter has an x4 rather than x16 PCI-Express slot.

While it's true that you should be keeping an eye on your wallet, you also need to keep an eye on the future and upgrades – and the ConRoeXFire-eSATA2 has both bases covered.



Microsoft say that to run Vista, you need a processor of at least 800MHz with 512MB memory and a DirectX 9 graphics card. However, to be Vista Premium Ready and enjoy Vista Ultimate with all the bells and whistles on, you need a 1GHz processor, 1GB memory and a recent-gen graphics card. To check what graphics cards you need, see ati.amd.com/technology/windowsvista for compatible Radeons, and nvidia.com/page/technology_vista_home.html for GeForce. If you decide to buy new, Microsoft are offering something called Express Upgrade through certain vendors such as Dell, HP, Acer and Toshiba. This means that if you buy certain Vista Capable branded PCs before March 15, an upgrade to the new Windows comes free

03 ASUS EN8800GTS

This is where things get tricky. There's no point going for the most expensive card you can lay your hands on, because it'll be superseded by the time the credit card statement turns up. There's also no point going for an interim 'budget buy', because you'll miss out on Vista's coolest features (see 'Vista Ultimate: The Extras', below). And sadly, our top-value Radeon X1950 Pro is a DirectX 9

card, which means you'll not be able to enjoy DirectX 10 showcases and demos, many of which are already around, with games following shortly.

So go for the cheapest GeForce 8800, the GTS variants of which are beginning to sink below £245. It's a card that's in such strong demand, you'll have no trouble getting good money for it on eBay when the time comes to upgrade.

GRAPHICS CARD £245



04 Corsair XMS2-5400C4 TwinX 1GB

Sorry, but there's no getting away from it. If you're planning on upgrading to a Core 2 Duo motherboard and you're still using older DDR memory (and most people are), you can't carry it over with you. You need new stuff.

You don't need to know about the mechanics of DDR2, except that it's an improvement over what you already have.



DDR2 MEMORY £80

SOLD AS	CLOCK SPEED	BUS SPEED	RECOMMENDED FOR
PC2-5300	DDR2-667	333MHz	Ordinary users
PC2-6400	DDR2-800	400MHz	Beginner overclockers
PC2-7200	DDR2-900	450MHz	Habitual overclockers
PC2-8000	DDR2-1000	500MHz	Poseur geeks
PC2-8500	DDR2-1066	533MHz	Dotty nerds

Vista Ultimate: The Extras

Microsoft have recently announced a number of additions to Ultimate edition, making the flagship Vista even more attractive...

1 Hold 'Em Poker

Appearing in Windows Vista Games Explorer, the Extra version of *Poker* looks delectable. The only problem is that, unlike *Hearts*, you can only play against computer players and not over a network.

2 Windows DreamScene

This natty bit of stuff allows you to use video for your desktop wallpaper rather than static images. It's something that radically changes how your Vista looks.

3 BitLocker and EFS Enhancements

Two tools to help you get more from Vista's new security features. The BitLocker Drive Preparation Tool configures your drive for encryption, and Secure Online Key Backup keeps a copy of your BitLocker key.

QUESTIONS QUESTIONS

Got something you want to ask? Just want something else to read? Either way, this little box will make you happy...

Q Why don't I just get a cheaper version of Vista?

A Because Vista Ultimate edition is the one you'll be drooling over. As a gamer, you'll already have the right hardware to appreciate its graphical flashiness.

Q What's this about downloading online?

A You can now buy Vista over the Internet, but at present Microsoft aren't extending this delivery method to anyone outside North America.

Q Why not just stick with XP?

A Make sure you read the opening letter of Dear Wendy (see page 94), which answers this question.

Q When will the first DirectX 10 games arrive?

A Not for some time yet. And remember, you don't actually need DirectX 10 hardware to run Vista. You can keep your existing graphics card.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Wife clonked you with a Tefal frying pan after you played WOW for 146 hours solid? Dog peed in your shoe again? Spin class at the gym left you shattered and broken? We can't help with any of those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

EXCITING EXPERIENCE

Q A lot of people are claiming that Windows Vista is just a tarted-up version of XP, and I must admit that a significant proportion of previews I've read online tend to focus on how Vista looks rather than on more important issues, such as its stability, security and value for money. Should I just stick with what I already have?

Jake Peterson

A The various interface effects inside Windows XP – smooth fading, translucent selections, transparency and the like – were a simple play by Microsoft to tempt users away from older and noticeably squarer versions of their operating system. They had the effect of making it look modern yet familiar, yet at the same time distanced it from every product that had gone before it. It was plainly new and different and exciting, hence the stupid name: XP was short for 'experience'.

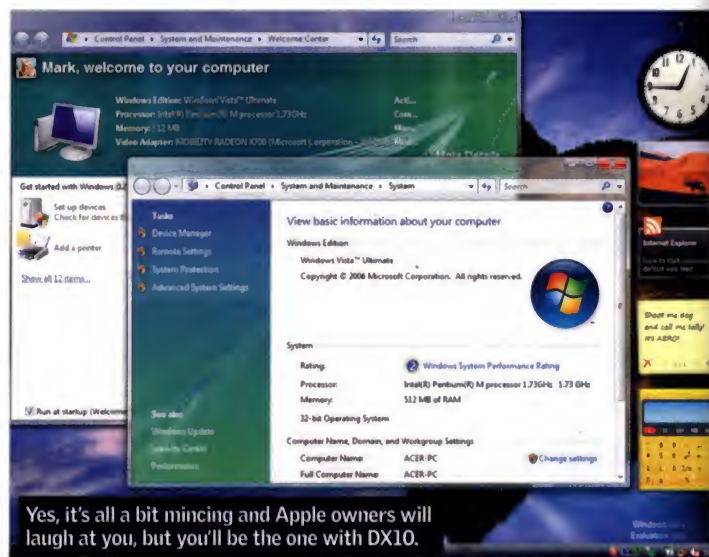
Of course, after you'd experienced the 'experience' for longer than ten minutes, you soon realised that the super awesome visuals you'd been lusting over were actually rather crap and pointless, and that the best thing to do was switch them all off. Why waste your machine's valuable resources on rendering the duller aspects of its operating system – menus, buttons, dialog boxes, that sort of thing – when they could be put to better use actually doing stuff inside applications?

Vista is the same all over again. Those who criticised XP – and I count myself among them – will be using it, liking it and forgetting they ever hated it come the summer. And while in reality it's a relatively small step up the computing ladder, with only a few new features to please us, it does offer DirectX 10 – something which may prove to be its biggest draw.

And don't forget how hardware manufacturers dropped off their support for older systems. Give it two years, and what you're using now will be considered antique. So then. To answer your question, no. Be excited about upgrading!

LAPPY HAPPY

Q I have £1,600 to spend on a new laptop for gaming only. However,



Yes, it's all a bit mincing and Apple owners will laugh at you, but you'll be the one with DX10.

I'm confused at the moment, what with Windows Vista and DirectX 10 and all the different graphics cards. I'm also not sure which laptop company is the best: is it Rock? Alienware? Dell?

I want my new machine to last for a while, and I want to be able to play every game with ease. I'm looking to buy at the end of February or beginning of March, or should I hold on a little longer?

Craig Millar

A For that kind of money, the world is your oyster. Make sure you configure your new machine with a T7600 2.33GHz Core 2 Duo processor and 2GB RAM. Sadly, the graphics choice is not as straightforward. You'll not see NVIDIA's all-conquering G80 flagship shrunk to fit notebooks until much later in the year, and so you'll either have to plump for the GeForce Go 7950 GTX or Mobility Radeon X1900, neither of which are DirectX 10 parts. Plus, because it's a laptop, the upgrade path is something of a cul-de-sac.

Which brings me onto the screen. Go for 17 inches or above, but I'd stick with a resolution of 1,680 x 1,050 rather than anything more exotic, for the simple reason that until the G80 and new Radeon are made mobile, you'll not have the grunt to actually deal with that kind of size. Plus, you'll get a headache squinting at it.

I'd not bother buying second hard drives, extra batteries or fancy leather

cases for the simple reason that I envisage the machine staying put on your desk doing little else but entertaining you. If it's available, you might want to pick a TV tuner card of some description and do away with the telly in your bedroom.

As for which brand to choose, you can't go far wrong with Rock because the company provides such a superb warranty. Evesham.com is another solid British brand, and both HP and Dell are fine choices – but you might want to phone one of their technical support lines before you hand over your money to see if you can actually understand the helpdesk staff. I can't.

FATTER SATA

Q I'd like to add a faster hard drive to my PC, on which I want to put all my games and improve load times. At the moment, all I have is a bog-standard 80GB IDE drive which has Windows XP and my clobber on it. My motherboard has two SATA connectors, so would it be possible to keep my existing drive and also run a SATA one for games? I'm not sure, but I think I read somewhere that the games must be on the same HDD as Windows to run best, or is this rubbish? Would I even notice a decrease in load times?

Steve Johnson

A You can certainly add a new SATA unit to your setup, though you must remember that SATA refers to the interface

GRAPHICS		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 7.1	10 JAN 07
ATI	CATALYST VISTA 8.3.100.12.1	13 FEB 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 9.1.1	2 NOV 06
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 9.1.1	05 JAN 07
SOUND		
MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI 2.0.9.0007	30 OCT 06
CREATIVE	X-FI FOR VISTA 2.0.0001	28 DEC 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY AUDIGY 2	9 OCT 06
CREATIVE	AUDIGY 4 2.0.9.0016	12 JAN 07
CREATIVE	AUDIGY FOR VISTA 2.12.0001	

@ wandy@dearwandy.com

✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Give it two years and what you're using now will be considered an antique. Be excited about upgrading!"

Wandy hands out some wise Windows Vista wisdom

rather the drive itself, meaning that it won't be noticeably faster than your existing IDE drive.

To get the most from your games (and the least from your load times), you need to create a RAID array from two or more SATA HDDs and install all your games there. It's nonsense that you need to keep them alongside Windows.

ST-ST-ST-STUTTER

Q I've had my computer for a while – almost three years – and over that time I've upgraded it, added RAM, bought a better graphics card, a DVD writer and a new power supply (the fan died on my old one). It's been running great, but recently it's started to stutter. I don't know how else to explain it, but programs stall for about a second every minute or so. Playing music is fine, but playing movies online, selecting icons, even some games are doing it.

I've tried all sorts of computer patch-ups, including registry cleaners, anti-virus and anti-spyware programs, streamlining Windows, defragging and so on. I don't know what else to do except a complete reformat. What do you suggest?

Lyndsay Carrick

A Something like this could be caused by any number of things. I'd first run Windows Task Manager (or, preferably, Process Explorer from Sysinternals), and see what happens to your CPU usage when the pause occurs. It could be that your machine has been infected by malware that lunches your processor at set intervals, or it could even be a legitimate process such as an anti-virus tool or other utility

which performs regular background checks. Try briefly disabling any such programs and seeing if the problem is still there.

I would then check that your cooling fans are all spinning freely, as hot components behave erratically. I'd also run HCI Design's MemTest utility to make sure that your RAM is good.

After that, you're into the realm of failing hardware. It could be that your motherboard is on its way out, in which case the pause may be related to disk activity; it could even be something simpler like your graphics card.


If you have the patience, you could try installing Windows to another partition on the drive and see if the stutter recurs: if so, it's most likely to be hardware. Please drop into the Dear Wandy forums to let me know how you get on.

DIRECT DSL

Q Can I plug my ADSL modem router directly into a BT socket without using a broadband microfilter?

Graham Hine

A In a word, yes. What you need is an adaptor to allow the small American-style RJ11 wire from the back of the modem to hook up with the larger BT socket on your wall – they can be had for between £1-5 at places such as CPC and Maplin online.

You do still need to use a DSL filter on other sockets where you have telephones or faxes, or if you intend sharing the socket to which your modem is connected. 



UK meets USA.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Dan Forever) Considering I only ever use IE for updating Windows, is there any point upgrading to IE7? Considering it's ingrained in Windows, will it make my system any more efficient, secure, better or worse? (OneOne) It takes a bit of getting used to, but it does have considerable security improvements over v6, plus stuff like tabbed browsing. (Wandy) IE7 actually breaks Roxio Easy Media Creator 7 and gawd knows what else. You have to roll back to v6 to fix it. (bino) Personally, I think we should just use Opera, it's just better than everything out there. (mcstuff) IE7 broke my FIFA 07.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE

Count	Issue
12	File Extensions
0	Software Locations
0	Registry Integrity
0	Windows Fonts
0	Help And Resources
10	Shared DLLs
1	Startup Programs
19	Add/Remove Programs
0	Virtual Devices
13	Temp Files Shortcuts
0	Custom Controls

21 REGISTRY MECHANIC

COSTS £19 FROM pctools.com/registry-mechanic

Before going any further, I should point out that you probably don't need a tool such as this, especially since it costs money. You'll probably find that, even if that wheezing crapheap you call your PC is swinning about in leftovers from programs you uninstalled 18 months back, Windows doesn't give you too much cause for concern. Most people aren't interested in keep their system free of rubbish, in the same way that most people aren't interested in scraping limescale from round the rim. If it's not actually doing any harm being there, why not just leave it?

However, if you're someone who loathes installing and uninstalling

software because all you see is dead registry entries and unused DLLs lying about your hard drive, then a utility such as Registry Mechanic is an ideal way to feed your irrational preoccupations. How so?

Well, what Registry Mechanic does is hunt out all the invalid entries from around your system – including the Start Menu – and prunes them. It keeps a backup and can automatically run System Restore, meaning that you needn't lose anything.

It's short on documentation and often never adequately explains what it's up to, but it's not yet given me any cause for alarm.



Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at watchdog@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

Jonny asked CyberPower for a refund but was told he would be charged a 15% restocking fee



THE ACCUSED: CyberPower

PROBLEM: Problems with new PC

When reader Jonny McCullough decided to get a new PC, he pushed the boat out and opted for a high-spec custom gaming box from CyberPower. Upon arrival, however, his über-system wasn't quite how Jonny had envisaged: he'd been sent the wrong operating system, the front USB ports didn't work, his Audigy soundcard wasn't installed (despite being sent separately) wasn't even in a box, and the temperature reader he'd paid extra for didn't work.

He arranged for the correct OS to be sent out and the soundcard to be returned, but a week later the PC began crashing without explanation. At this point, Jonny promptly sent the whole machine back, and while it was there, paid for an upgrade to his graphics card and power supply too.

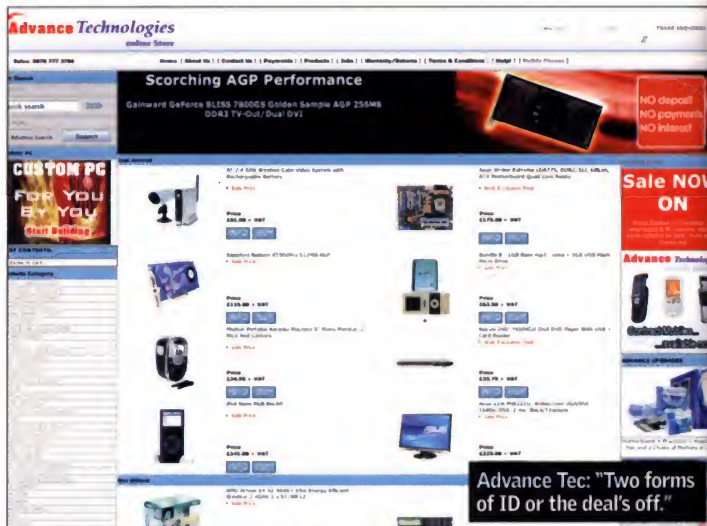
A month later his PC arrived back at his house, but to Jonny's woe there were yet more problems: there were huge chips in the case, the USB door was broken, the media-card reader now didn't work, the temperature gauge still wasn't working, the PC was still constantly crashing and the case was dangerously hot to the touch.

Fed up by this point, Jonny contacted CyberPower to ask for a refund but was told he'd be charged a 15% restocking fee as the original order was now over 30 days old. Wary of suffering more problems, Jonny reluctantly accepted and sent his PC back for a refund, but a week later still hadn't received any money.

WATCHDOG



Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...



PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: A week after our first contact with CyberPower, they replied to say they were shocked to hear of Jonny's complaint as the refund had gone through and they weren't aware of any problems. "When a refund is requested we need to protect our revenue," they claimed, "as PC components can lose a lot of value in 30 days. When Jonathan stated the PC was back here for weeks, this was at his request. He wanted to change three of the major components in his system – this is practically a rebuild. The technical problems he seems to have had appear to mainly be delivery damage. The soundcard was left out as there wasn't enough room in the PC."

FINAL VERDICT: Money refunded but CyberPower refuse to take any blame for the problems and urge customers to read their T&Cs thoroughly.



THE ACCUSED: Advance Tec

PROBLEM: Credit card security issues

Ah, the Irish. They've given us Guinness, the world's most hilarious stereotype and our very own Steve Hogarty. But if you happen to live there, ordering on the Internet can prove... eventful, as reader Tim Walsh discovered. Having ordered some parts from Advance Tec's website, he received the following reply a week later. "Your order has not left us yet as the transaction came back as a security code match. This means the card you have given us is not registered at the address given. As you live in S. Ireland our

streamline machine cannot verify the address. If possible, can you email me a copy of the front and back of the card and a copy of your utility bill so we don't have this problem again in the future."

With all the recent furore over credit card fraud, Tim was rightly a bit concerned about this request and got in contact with Visa. They confirmed that he should not carry out the request. Tim then discovered that his account HAD been debited but try as he might, he couldn't get back in touch with Advance Tec.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Advance Tec replied as follows: "The order in question was classed as an international order, and as such there are stringent guidelines and procedures we have in place in order to avoid Internet mail order fraud. On occasion, we will request a copy of a utility bill or bank statement (amounts crossed out) and sometimes with an uncertain and dubious transaction, a copy of the payment card for verification purposes. Overall, these procedures have consistently lowered the number of customer chargebacks caused by fraudulent online transactions.

"With the customer in question, it is correct that his account was debited. The amount was credited back because we could not process the order without any further verification from the customer."

While this problem was easily sorted out, it's good to remember that you should always be extremely cautious when giving out credit card information. If in doubt, get in touch with your credit card company.

FINAL VERDICT: Money returned.

REMEMBER:
SPEAKERS ARE NO
GOOD IF YOU'VE
GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

And lo, the hardware guru did cometh and tell them what kit to buy. Blessed is he...

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £420
MANUFACTURER XFX
WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

It would have been nice to have an ATI card against which we could compare the flagship GeForce, but the new Radeon isn't due for at least a month. So NVIDIA's DirectX 10 heavyweight won by default. It's still the fastest video card you can buy, but be careful – there are no Vista drivers yet.



PROCESSOR

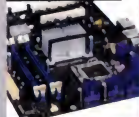


CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

PAY £790
MAN Intel
WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XB2

EXPECT TO PAY £155
MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XB, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £175
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



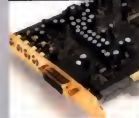
VP930

EXPECT TO PAY £250
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £140

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

RADEON X1950 PRO

EXPECT TO PAY £130
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

A dazzling card at a glaringly low price. Sapphire's X1950 Pro gives you class-leading performance, beating both the GeForce 7900 GS and X1900 GT – the card on which it's based. And if you're looking to get into CrossFire, two of these filling your slots will keep you entertained for months.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY £125
MANUFACTURER Intel

WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROE EX-FIRE ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £65
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD



1200JS SATA

EXPECT TO PAY £41
MANUFACTURER Western Digital

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

It's not like a 120GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it's more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, a couple of hundred music files and the odd porn flick will still leave plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VE710S

EXPECT TO PAY £142
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

Not a lot of dosh buys you an awful lot of screen. The VE710S is a budget-priced 17in flat panel featuring an 8ms response time, 1,280x1,024 resolution and producing bright, crisp images worthy of the ViewSonic name. The company's UltraBrite technology gives rich and vivid colours in games too.

SOUND CARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £32

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £37
MANUFACTURER Creative

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.



"No F*ing Lightweights!"**



computerandvideogames.com

"Addicted since 1981, reborn in 2006"

PCZONE

FREEPLAY



Skint? Play PC games for feck all...

**FREE
GAMES!**

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH

Freeplay nag

THIS MONTH I'M going to tell you a joke. It's about a horse. A horse walks into a bar, and the barman says: "Hello horse, where can I find lots of great free things to play on my PC?" The horse replies thusly: "You can find such things in PC ZONE's Freeplay section of course, of course."

The barman promptly notifies the relevant authorities and the horse is safely removed from the bar, but as the night meanders onwards he can't shake the sage equine advice. "Freeplay section," he muses out loud before calling to his wife. "Moir, what do you make of this Freeplay then?"

A large, red-faced woman bundles round the corner of the bar. "It sounds like you've been having your horse dreams again, you old fool!" she snaps.

Defeated, the barman turns back to the waiting customers and continues pouring drinks. Deep inside he swears he'll get to the bottom of the matter. He never does. That barman was my father.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, staff writer

Try this!

Snakes On A Plane



The Burning Crusade is packed full of pop culture references, found mostly in the form of cunningly named NPCs. Our favourite has to be a quest found in Sporeggar in Zangarmarsh called 'Bring me a shrubbery', but we also like the crashed plane covered in snakes in Nesingwary Camp.



104 Demo pages

Try out the latest games right now!



106 Buzz

News and culture from a world of free PC gaming



110 Freeware

The crop-cream of free Internet gaming delivered straight to your doorstep



112 Play!

Essential reviews of the latest mods, maps and add-ons



113 Intelligent design

Maxis senior designer Alex Hutchinson on how to snag a gamer



117 Fight Club

We did a fight on the Internet, did you see it?



**PCZONE
FREE-O-METER**



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



288.9
HOURS*

FREEPLAYDEMOS

Demos

Jon Blyth rounds up our free DVD...



ARMED ASSAULT

This is a serious, realistic combat simulation, so stop flying the helicopter into the sea www.armedassault.com



PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

PUT ON YOUR shiniest fighting hat! Equip your most blasty shotgun! Paint your face, stick a hunting knife in your gob and run screaming at the enemy! Die in seconds, as the other team, patiently lying on their tum-tums, snipe your stupid face off your skull.

Armed Assault is the war game which, in terms of realism, makes *Red Orchestra* look like a dozen screaming girls rolling around on a bouncy castle. It's not the best-looking game in the world; when people tell you that war is ugly, they're probably just saying that it's a bit pixelly over in Iraq.

This demo gives you the run of three multiplayer maps – an eight-player co-operative mode, 16-player Capture The Flag, and Capture The Island, which can have over 60 players. The single-player is missing, as are a few of the advanced features, but it's enough to give you a good, dirty feel.

Don't worry about the slightly wordless installation process, or the eight unlabelled checkboxes that appear on



start-up. It's all part of that lack of polish that gives *Armed Assault* its charm. That and the fact you can write dirty words on the map.



RUNNING INTO BATTLE

Hurray! I've spawned! And there's some sheds! Sheds! I bet there's loads of ammo in those, and a bulletproof mask! Maybe a tunnel leading to a quad damage! I'm totally pumped!

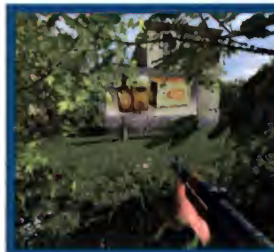


ALLY AWARENESS

Hey, squad member! Yoo-hoo, you over there! Why can't I jump? That's what soldiers do, because they're so pumped about going on a rampage. Also, some soldiers have guns in their eyes, which is brilliant.

THE ADVENTURES OF TED RUBBISH

Ted is not very good...



TACTICAL USE OF TREES

Yawn. We've been hiding in this cover for ages and it's totally sapping how pumped I am about this mission. I'm going to use this grenade to catapult myself into the enemy barracks. SPREE!



TED IS DEAD

Oh dear – what's up with Ted today? OK, new tactic. I'm going to lie here and pretend to be a Cactuar from *Final Fantasy*. Then they'll find me and I'll fire needles into their eyes. Here comes the hotstepper, losers!

SAM & MAX: EPISODE 2 - SITUATION: COMEDY

www.telltalegames.com/samandmax

Let them entertain you

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a monthly release schedule to make magazine coverage confusing. You'll probably be playing *Episode 3* by the time you get this, and feeling a little bit let down after the more engaging puzzles of *Episode 2*. Or you might have only played *Episode 1*, in which case



you're missing out on the extra fun of *Episode 2*, which is this game here. In any event, this is the best episode so far, even if it only lasts ten minutes.

TIME TO CALL THE RSPCA

Which came first - the chicken or the dog?



CHICKEN CHAT

This chicken is your landlord; it'll be your job to convince him that a large cow isn't a cow. He hates cows, you see, and you have a cow in your lounge. What are you waiting for? Start denying the existence of a plainly obvious cow!



SNAP YOUR BANJO

In real life, dogs can't play banjos. It's this distinction between gaming and reality that stops us all being insane. It's the self-same power of human reasoning that keeps us from attempting to incorporate *Sex Tetris* into our love lives.

UFO: AFTERLIGHT

www.ufo-afterlight.com

That's how you tell when UFOs have just had sex

IF YOU'RE NEW to the *UFO* series, an insight can be gained from a proud quote on the official website. 'A deep and intriguing strategy game, with RPG elements that add a less geeky feel.' For RPG elements to make your game less geeky, you know you've got yourself one hell of a... Deep and intriguing strategy game.

The demo lets you play through a tutorial level, where the main thing is to remember that the time-control settings reset to pause with every window that pops up. Then the option screens open, the daunting sense of RPG and strategy begin, and you can play the first ten days of the human colonisation of Mars.



1 Killing mechs is fun because they explode - but then again, they don't beg or scream. What's your favourite thing to kill?

2 This is Gene. She can walk at three different paces, and repeats herself like a *Little Britain* talking toy.

3 Watch out for this time-speed selection thing, it snaps to 'stop' a lot during the tutorial.

LIFE ON MARS

John Simm not included



SADNESS

He's saying goodbye to his home planet, along with a world of innocence, play and colourful toys made out of plush materials.



MENUS

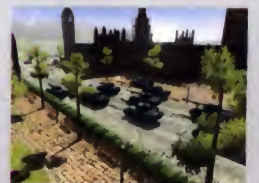
Never mind! There's loads of menus, options, strategy and equipment on Mars. Stick Earth up your gender-specifics!

THE BEST OF THE REST



XPAND RALLY XTREME

The only way this game could be any more Xtreme is by riding a Peugeot 405 through a stream of molten lava into a hellish dimension filled with pure human fear. It's still quite Xtreme though. www.xpandrally.com



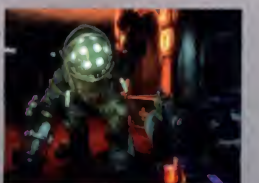
WAR FRONT: TURNING POINT

Another chance to play the alternate-reality WWII RTS, where tanks spit ice, Hitler had three balls and every Nazi has his own exoskeleton. The History channel in 2525 is going to be amazing. www.war-front.de/en/



STRONGHOLD 2

Stronghold 2 has recently come out on budget, so you can play this castle management game for less than it costs to fill a cholera pit with peasants. There's also fighting. www.2kgames.com/stronghold2



BIOSHOCK PODCAST

It's not a demo, so zip your trousers back up immediately and think about what you've done. If you can bear words without pictures, this podcast is well worth 13 minutes of your listening time. www.2kgames.com/cultrefrature/

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY

www.gamershell.com/download_17456.shtml



This multiplayer demo will let you play the Islands of Solomon. It's that blend of action and real-time strategy that might or might not work, depending on where the moon is in its cycle, so give the demo a whirl before our review.

SUPREME COMMANDER

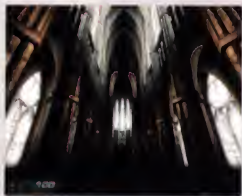
www.supremecommander.com



Play an early part of the single-player mission as part of the Cybran nation. They're the kind of symbiotic race who hate the humans, so you'll be killing lots of humans, just like the ones who raised you. You ungrateful little tyke.



SNIPPETS



DOOM 3 REIMS CATHEDRAL

www.crymod.com
Hiding on our DVD this month is a single-player map which could save you hundreds of pounds in travel expenses. It's the Notre-Dame cathedral in the Doom 3 engine! Put your gran in front of the monitor and she honestly could not tell the difference, the silly old bat.



GOOGLE SPACE INVADERS

www.plasticbag.org/archives/2007/01/on_space_art_in_sebas/
A bunch of no-good nerds have taken advantage of Google by setting up a giant art piece underneath their Google Earth survey plane as it flew overhead. It's rumoured that, by mid-February, giant space invader sprites will be visible on Google's popular world map.



PIANO HERO

Dust off your old MIDI keyboard

www.halitestudios.com/pianohero.aspx

WELL, WE REALLY only need to print a screenshot for you to understand what this is all about. Streams of colour coming down the screen and corresponding with keys on the piano keyboard is quite an obvious gameplay concept to anybody who's ever witnessed *Dance Dance Revolution* or, of course, *Guitar Hero*. As far as we know, it's never been done with a piano before until

Piano Hero came along, a free, open source piano-teaching tool.

It works with most MIDI files, meaning you can learn to play pretty much any tune, especially videogame tunes, as long as you don't mind it sounding like a rubbish ringtone. Songs can be slowed if you're practising, and left- and right-handed sections can be practised separately too. You'll need a MIDI-keyboard too, so check your lofts.

DEVELOP A 360 GAME

XNA Tools allow bedroom coders to create Xbox 360 titles

msdn.microsoft.com/directx/xna

WE'VE JUST FOUND out, much to our disgust, that XNA stands for 'XNA's Not Acronymed'. While that's blatantly not funny, clever or grammatically accurate, we still have to admit that the capabilities of Microsoft's computer game design tools are impressive.

XNA Game Studio Express is a free set of tools designed to facilitate game development for Windows, with an option to port your work to the 360 for an added cost. It opens the gate for a flood of freeware developers to quickly and easily develop games which would otherwise have taken an age to code – and if that sounds like PR talk, well it is.

All we've seen of XNA so far is that movie they released two or three years ago, with the car crumpling up in different ways. We're still waiting for our car crumpling game, Microsoft.



FRENCHMAN FIRST TO LEVEL 70

WOW nerd puts lesser nerds to shame

www.youtube.com/watch?v=otSAw_BIPiQ

YOU'D THINK THAT the new *WOW* expansion, *The Burning Crusade*, would be something to be savoured by new and veteran players alike. Apparently not, as one player (or perhaps hundreds of thousands) raced to become the first to hit the new level cap of 70.

We're self-proclaimed *WOW* nerds here at *PC ZONE*, but not to any serious degree. What's being shown in the YouTube movie linked to the above is nothing short of ridiculous though; one 24-year-old French player, with the help of his guild, grinding his way through masses of enemies for 28 hours straight. Now he's level 70 and everybody hates him. It all took place within a single session too, meaning he must be one very stinky Frenchman.



DO A BARREL ROLL!

Starfox enters Freespace freeware www.game-warden.com/starfox

THE OPEN SOURCE Freespace engine whips a great big dollop of interestingness at you from time to time, most notably things like *Babylon 5* freeware games. This *Starfox*-inspired project is particularly enticing though, especially as we're such big retro fans here at **PC ZONE** towers.

Starfox: Shadows Of Lylat is a freeware title currently being produced in the Freespace engine. Already there's a movie to behold, which clearly shows the Arwing zipping about in space and shooting at random things. There's no hapless Slippy being chased by space flies quite yet, but we're pretty sure that's being implemented soon.

As long as the project doesn't become stagnant and forgotten like so many others of its ilk, we'll be sure to keep you posted on any further developments.



SuperFX chip not required.

DEUS EXCITING

HOTP project coming along in great bounding leaps www.offtopicproductions.com/hotp

SINCE WE LAST covered the *Deus Ex* High Definition Texture Project, the developers have been working relentlessly to create even more high-definition content for the classic shooter RPG. Take a look at some of these character shots to see what we mean – what began as a few extra polygons on a crate has evolved into a complete reworking of the game's main characters.

The updates shown here aren't quite ready for release just yet (what's on their website right now is essentially a proof of concept), but the team also plans to incorporate dynamic weapon modding.

As an excited team member exclaimed: "You got a sniper-rifle? Want a silencer on it? No problem! Drag the mod icon over the weapon icon as per the original, in the inventory. Go back to the main game and voila! You can see the silencer on the weapon." Sound good? We reckon so too.



This music video is weird.



Paul Denton

One of the best goatees in games today.



"Do I have pen on my face?"

SNIPPETS



GET A FIRST LIFE

www.getafirstlife.com
Ho ho, chuckle chuckle. We're not huge fans of *Second Life*, a world in which horrible people do sexy emotes on each other for real money, so we found this parody website fairly chucklesome. *Second Life* developers Linden Labs have apparently seen the funny side too.



DOD: STORMREACH EXPANDS

www.dod.com/article/581
Atari just don't know how to stop loving, and so are pouring out an endless barrage of free updates to their *Dungeons & Dragons: Stormreach* MMORPG. Not just rubbish big fixes either, but actual content. *Evil Resurgent* is the latest in the series of free updates.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH FIFA MANAGER 07



Patch 1.0 "fixes problem with children going to wrong school." Hold on, is this the right game?

Movie of the month

LEFT 4 DEAD

"Hav a luk a d nu left4dead trailer on ur dvd" we would say if we were extremely desperate to draw attention to the ludicrous name of this co-op zombie horror survival game. But we're not, so instead we'll just review this movie in four static screenshots. Like a rubbish director's commentary.

"Zombies is it? We'll send them back to hell, or space, or wherever they're from."

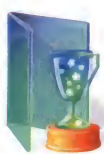
The four players find a headless and bloodied corpse: this really shouldn't surprise them.

The zombies are very grainy-looking, and love shaking their arms to create blur effects.

The lady's 'doing a Max Payne', oblivious to the massive zombie coming up behind her.

Take your PC gaming to the next level

Windows Vista brings a whole host of next-generation features to the discerning PC gamer. Here are just a few that you need to know about



Windows Vista is the brand new version of Windows. Not only does it offer huge improvements in security, usability and appearance over Windows XP, but it's also primed to meet all the demands that 3D games will be throwing at it in the near future.

It all revolves around DirectX 10, the next-generation interface that games programmers are going to be using to push the boundaries of 3D games. DirectX 10 brings with it incredible new levels of detail and the ability to have more complex objects moving around in each scene. The result is stunning and offers a much more cinematic experience. Want to see what we're talking about? Just take a look at the in-game

footage of *Crysis* at www.crysis-online.com. You'll be blown away.

There are other improvements, too. Windows Vista also introduces a new Games Explorer, which will make all your games accessible from one single location. And if you share your PC with your kids, then you'll be happy to know that there are built-in parental controls to prevent them playing games that are unsuitable for their ages. Also, if you own an Xbox 360, it's good to know that its wireless controllers will work with Windows Vista as well.

So, if you want to stay current with your PC gaming, then Windows Vista is the way to go. Oh, and those massive improvements in PC security, usability and appearance? Don't worry, they're all thrown in for free. ☑

Is my PC up to running Windows Vista?

Don't panic, there's every chance that your PC will run Windows Vista without any upgrades at all, especially if it's already capable of playing the latest 3D games. However, all PCs are not created equal, and to ensure that you get the best gaming experience, only PCs that are worthy can upgrade to Windows Vista.

It's easy to find out if your current PC meets the necessary hardware requirements – simply download the free Windows Vista Upgrade Advisor from www.microsoft.com/windowsvista/getready. Run it on your PC and you'll get the definitive verdict on whether your computer is up to running Windows Vista.

Windows Vista gives each PC a Windows Experience rating that tells you at a glance how powerful your

processor, graphics card, memory and hard drive are, with a single combined score. The higher the number it comes up with, up to a current maximum of 5.9, the better your PC will be able to run Windows Vista and whatever games you want to play on it.



RATE YOUR PC Get an at-a-glance rating to find out how well your PC will run Windows Vista.

Game information

Click on any game icon and here you'll see information about who made it, when you last played it and what version you have.

See saved games

Simply right-click on a game's icon here to get to the Saved Games folder where you can access your saves.

Media Center

The brilliant Windows Media Center lies at the heart of the Ultimate and Home Premium editions of Windows Vista. Connect your PC to your HDTV and browse your music and videos. Also, with Media Center and a TV tuner card in your PC, you can play back, record and timeshift TV programmes! Get Windows Media Center Extender and you can stream your media from a PC anywhere in your house. If you own an Xbox 360, it has this Extender capability built into it.



Get more from your PC with Windows Vista: The Official Magazine

Whether you're already running Windows Vista, or thinking about upgrading, the Windows Vista Magazine tells you everything you need to know

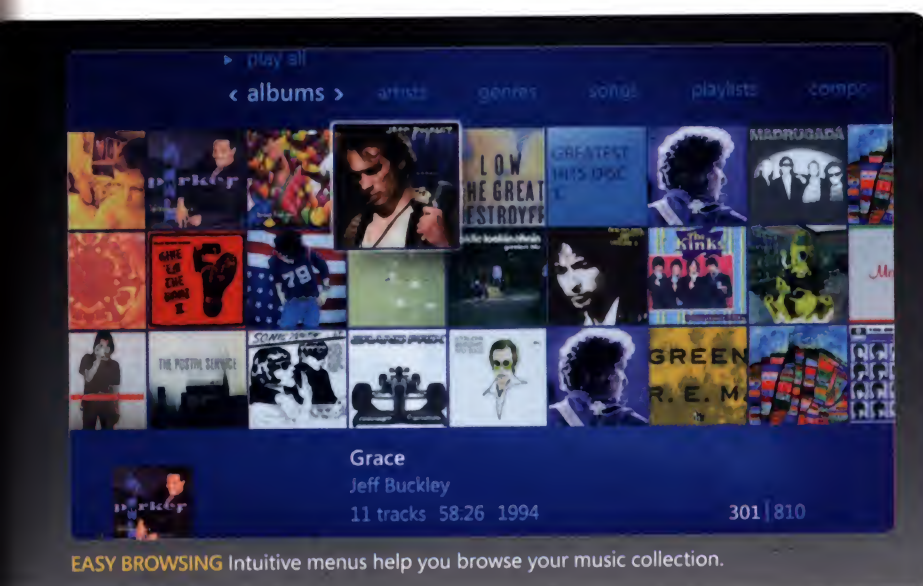
We'll show you...

- How to tell whether your PC will run Windows Vista
- Simple, cost-effective upgrades to get your PC into peak condition
- PCs you can buy today that will run Windows Vista at its best
- How to install Windows Vista and be up and running in 30 minutes
- What you can do with Windows Vista that you couldn't do with Windows XP
- Great new hardware and software that runs under Windows Vista
- And much more!



Issue two is out now – only £3.99

Find out more at www.windowstviamagazine.co.uk





Freeware



Steve Hogarty takes a free trip through gaming history

COUNTERCLOCKWISE

Now with authentic real-time 3D graphics!

Dev: Nenad Jalsovec and friends | www.16x16.org

YOU'VE PLAYED SNAKE on your mobile, or maybe even the amazing and under-appreciated *Achtung, Die Kurve!* for DOS, but it's less likely you've played a game called *Knot In 3D*. A Speccy game from the early '80s, *Knot In 3D* had mind-blowing solid 3D graphics wrapped around a gameplay concept best summed up as a three-dimensional first-person *Tron*.

Truth be told, the developers were probably so thrilled with the fact they'd made this 3D engine, they promptly created the most three-dimensional game they could – even today, playing *Knot In 3D* is likely to make you vomit with joyful disorientation.

Counterclockwise is a remake of *Knot In 3D*, and while it's successfully managed to do away with the 'my brain, oh god my brain' factor, it retains the frantic action of the original. Taking place in a repeating cube-space, the game has you controlling a ship which leaves behind a trail of wall. Several AI-controlled ships also wander through this space, leaving walls as they go and gradually filling up the empty arena with their colourful barriers.

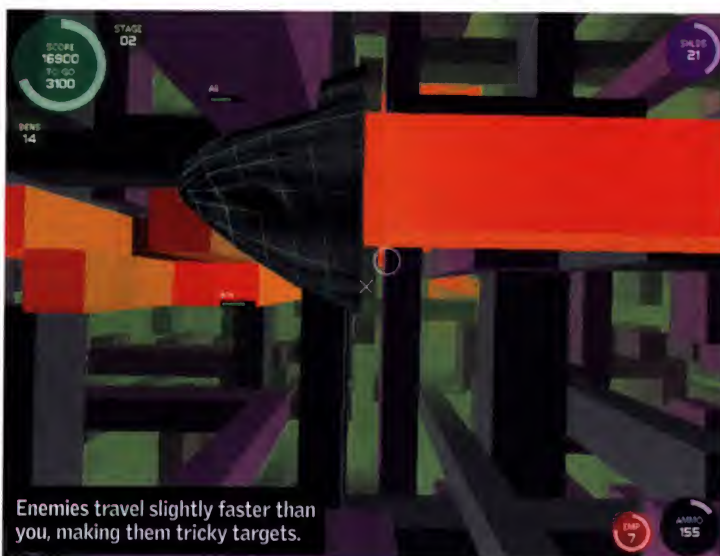
The objective is to earn as many points as possible, either by destroying the other ships (with a handy, mouse-controlled



Best of all, it makes you look like a sort of man-cat hybrid, with apparent feline-like reflexes...

gun), carrying out stunts (snaking through walls and the like), or just surviving.

It's basic and extremely accessible, and best of all it makes you look like some sort of man-cat hybrid to spectators, with apparent feline-like reflexes. And now that the latest version uploads your scores to an online table, you can really feel like you've achieved something while staring at the screen, entranced and mouth agape. *Counterclockwise* is a sublimely crafted remake – find it on our DVD.



Freeware brings you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, homebrews, remakes or webgames – you'll never have to buy another game again. This month's a bit of a retro special – it's hardly our fault remakes of old games make for such brilliant freeware titles, is it?



GLFRONTIER

With added GL

Dev: Tom Morton
www.soul-less.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/glfreer

I'M A REALLY big Frontier: Elite II fan. I've taken photos of military bases from orbit, I've scooped hydrogen from gas giants, I've got the prison system permits and I know that nine times out of ten, the woman selling drugs will be an undercover cop. *GLFrontier* takes *Frontier*, a game of epic proportions, shaves off all of the excess code and rewrites whatever needs rewriting in order to make the whole thing run in OpenGL.

That means it's real 3D, and it also means that it just works. No DOSBox to faff about with, no clock speeds to tweak and no frame-skips to slave over. Personally, I think it loses something along the way, a little piece of its soul. The planets aren't as round for one. Though I would say that, wouldn't I?

THRUST XTREME

Kick and step and twirl and thrust

Dev: Wiebo de Wit | wiebo.wordpress.com/my-pc-games

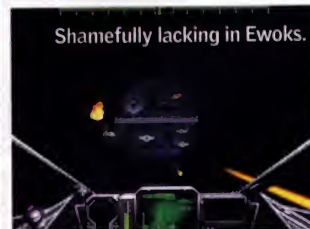
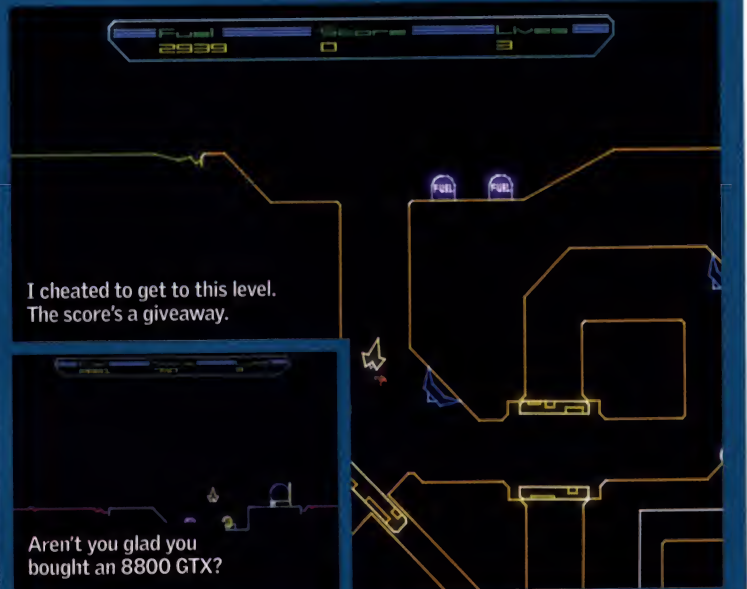
THRUST XTREME IS another astoundingly great remake (you'll find that's a theme running through this issue's Freeware), and a fantastic game in its own right too. It's based on the original *Thrust*, in which the very basic laws of 2D physics see you piloting a ship about a planet's interiors, competing with gravity, enemy turrets and a big ball dangling from your rear.

The game and its levels remain almost entirely unchanged from the retro versions, right down to the reverse gravity levels which prompted many BBC Micro users to turn their TVs upside-down. The objective is to fly down inside the various planets to retrieve an orb, which becomes attached to your ship. Once attached, you must fly it and yourself back into space,

all the while collecting fuel and destroying turrets.

As with *Counterclockwise*, it's a very basic premise and one which belies a huge amount of depth. A world editor allows you to build your own levels, while the visuals give off a wonderful neon glow. What's more, the simple shapes of the original appear unscathed by time, and of course the basic physics engine apparently remains unchanged. All of this also means that the difficulty level is pretty much identical to the original, with a paltry three-life limit and meagre fuel supplies punishing you for the slightest error.

Of course, if you're not a complete pussy who's been flapping around in the relative safety of modern games with their continues and save games, this won't be a problem for you.



STAR WARS

May the power be on your side

Dev: Minionsoft | www.minionsoft.com/

WITH ITS RUBBISH synthesised voices urging you to "use the force" and saying "I've got you now" and stuff, the *Star Wars* arcade cabinet is nothing more than a novelty piece. Really, they had one of the original sit-down cabinets at a recent videogames exhibition and, apart from the fact that I was quite comfortable in an X-Wing cockpit, it was pretty bad.

Last time I checked, TIE Fighters don't fire Christmas decorations at you.

Don't let that put you off trying out this revamped version though, which throws out the vector graphics and replaces them with actual textured polygons. With these improved graphics comes decent mouse-control, a nifty HUD and some welcome sound effects.

As ever, the appeal of the game is in racking up mammoth high-scores with the hope of getting a grainy photograph of yourself printed in *Zero* magazine (well, maybe that last bit no longer applies) – and in that respect, this remake flourishes. Aside from the odd graphical hiccup, this is a wonderful thing and well worth a play.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK



Dev: Jellyvision
www.youdontknowjack.com

Yes! It's the game that Will loves and constantly votes for in our underrated games pub conversations! Although it's the British version he prefers, here's a Flash-based webgame in a similar vein to the currently unavailable full game. Titled 'DisOrDat', the quiz throws a subject at you before listing a whole load of things and asking you which category they belong to.

For example, try figuring out whether 'Detroit Pistons' is a basketball team or a testicle-based cuisine. Or whether 'Atom' is a piece of software, a superhero, or both. Or whether 'Happy Feet' is a Golden Globe nominee or a Las Vegas showgirls show. It's all in good fun, and a great excuse to gather a few people around your PC to shout phrases like 'animal testicles'.

FREEPLAYPLAY!

Pirates - 4:53
Vikings - 5:00
Knights - 3:57



The pirate cleverly uses his pistol to light the barrel fuse.



PIRATES, VIKINGS AND KNIGHTS II

A transfixed *Will Porter* stares at his monitor while making pirate noises...



www.pvkii.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

WHO'D WIN IN a scrap between pirates, Vikings and knights? It's an age-old conundrum, and up until now any declared winners have come through conjecture and whimsy rather than scientific fact. To put our minds at rest though comes *Pirates, Vikings And Knights II*: a *Half-Life 2* mod that pits teams of scurvy buccaneers, godly sirrahs and Scandinavian warriors against each other with aplomb.

I was more than a mild aficionado of the original version back when it was a mod to the original *Half-Life*, so as soon

as this first public beta came around I was practically banging down the doors of the Freeplay section to cover it. At the time of writing only one of each faction's five classes are unlocked, and as you'd expect there are a few balancing issues, but there's still enough to confidently predict a rosy future for this gallant bunch of pillaging bastards.

Don't come in expecting *Dark Messiah* levels of mano a mano combat – but do expect attacks, blocks and parries as your axe-mad Viking, 'only a fleshwound' knights and nimble pirates

run around a stream of varied maps and different game modes.

Load up the current release and the first thing you'll do is choose a role as a pirate skirmisher, since pirates are always best. Good choice too, since they're currently the most fun to play. Armed with a flintlock pistol, explosive barrel and cutlass, they're nimble and scout-like – although teamwork, encouraged here, will be required to defeat the powerful broadsword strokes of the heavily armoured knights and fevered blade-slashes of the Vikings.

The best is certainly to come with this mod – what with the brains behind it promising parrot attacks, competitive dragon slayage, musical instrument-playing lords and more entertaining concepts for game modes like sieging and pillaging.

In its present state it's worth a look-see, even if it's not always clear exactly what's going on when you first log on to the server, where there are laughs aplenty. What's more, these normally involve explosive, ragdolling pirates – the best sort of pirates, hands down.

FREEPLAYPLAY!

Play: **MOD**



JURASSIC RAGE: EVOLUTION II

Steve Hogarty finds a way
mods.moddb.com/1561 | Mod for: UT2004

THE JURASSIC EH? It might not be the best era of dinosaur buffoonery (it's Cretaceous or nothing for us), but it's the most popular. In this mod for *UT2004*, you find yourself pitted against raptors intent on tearing your insides out, wearing your intestines like a frock and one of your lungs like a dainty neckerchief.

In practice it's you against a massive team of the dinosaurs, each of their

individual AI routines struggling to find a way to hunt you down. In multiplayer it becomes a matter of team survival across a handful of well-designed maps. Raptors tend to hang about in bunches too, loitering about the level like ASBO-youths rather than running around mindlessly like a regular bot.

They've also got some interesting AI which causes them to chase after sounds

they hear, making them run towards where your rocket just landed or, more lethally, towards the sound of your footsteps.

It all makes for some intense multiplayer and single-player action in the vein of some other mentionable co-op mods. Plus, as *Jurassic Rage* evolves (this being the second and non-final release), it's sure to become a *UT2004* mod you'll want to keep installed.



15 minutes to comply

Common design wisdom states that you have 15 minutes to grab a gamer from the moment they put the disc in until they take it out, snap it and go back to surfing for porn. This is often interpreted to mean the game needs more explosions in the first level, but in reality it means that a new title has a tiny time-window to bridge the gap between the game the player was promised and the game they're actually playing.

What are the most successful games in recent memory? Take *The Sims*, *WOW* and *GTA3*. All very different, but all push the player deep into the guts of the core experience within a few minutes. In *The Sims*, you're immediately buying couches and telling your little person to go to the bathroom; in *GTA3*, you're driving around a huge city environment and beating hookers with a bat; while in *WOW*, you're levelling up in a vast fantasy world and getting p0wn3d by a 13-year-old kid for being a loot ninja.

In all these cases, the distance between the promises on the back of the box and the actual game is extremely short. Who needs to waste 40 minutes in some generic third-person action game earning the abilities that make the game fun to play? Who needs to wade through another short-sighted RTS that thinks the only purpose of the single-player campaign is to drip-feed units and building options until the complete game is only available in the final mission?

If the initial feature-set can't deliver the core of the game experience, then the title is too complicated, confusing or poorly implemented to capture a broad audience. Developers can cry all they like about short attention spans and lack of player effort, but any issues with delivering it is a problem with the game, not its audience.

SPORE WILL BE RELEASED IN 2007 - WWW.SPORE.COM



EMERGENCE

Steve Hogarty wants to stay inside instead

www.map-factory.org/?m=650 | Map for: Doom 3

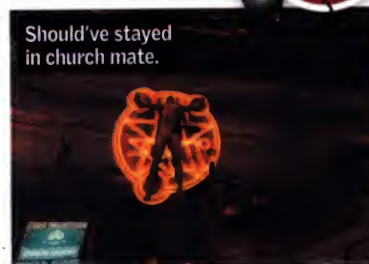
YOU KNOW, IT'S not easy being nice about every map you play. In my position, I have to force myself to like something about every free add-on I play, because in my head the developer is always some innocent, mute orphan child whose only form of expression is through mapping for *Doom 3*.

This month the innocent, mute orphan child has forced me to try and like *Emergence*, which is actually a rubbish single-player map. In it, you're molested by almost every different sort of enemy

from *Doom 3* within the space of four minutes. Sometimes you go outside into icy bits which cause you to slip around for a bit, and even if you put god mode on to get past the impossibly populated first few rooms, you'll find that there's not really enough ammo to get anything done.

It's like somebody's boiled *Doom 3* for an hour and this is the powdery brown stuff left in the bottom of the pan. This is what you should play if you want to play *Doom 3* but you've only got a few minutes left to live.

Play: **MAP**



EXITE

Steve Hogarty tries not to get over-Exited

www.exitemod.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2



Play: MOD



WITH *PORTAL* SLIPPING ever further into 2007, there's no better excuse to try out a homemade alternative in the form of *Exite*. It might be stuck in alpha stage development limbo, but what's on offer is a pretty solid rendition of the sort of portal-based fun we're expecting from Valve's official first-person puzzler, albeit contained within one level designed for test purposes.

Unlike some of the other *Portal*-inspired mods currently lingering about the Internet like a bad cyber-smell, *Exite* doesn't have crappy looking portals with

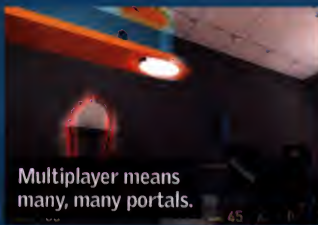
nothing but blurry cube-maps applied to them. You can see through these portals and have a good look at whatever's on the other side, and rather crucially you can launch stuff through them too.

This opens up the prospect of hilarious (or just deeply confusing) online play, in which players can slap space-bending anomalies on walls and floors before phys-gunning a crate through them and splattering whoever happens to be on the other side.

Falling forever, à la Valve's *Portal*.



Multiplayer means many, many portals.



Besides the test level, there's also a hideously ugly deathmatch level which apparently takes place in the aftermath of a kaleidoscope-eating competition in which the winner uncontrollably vomited everywhere. Other *Half-Life 2* maps tend to be quite buggy too, but if you stick to the test map you'll do fine. It's on our DVD, and we're pretty sure *Portal* won't be out yet, so give it a well-deserved shot.



"I'm going to grenade that unfortunate bastard."



Classic: MOD



KUNG FU EDITION

Hiiii-yargh!

mods.moddb.com/2295

EASILY ONE OF the greatest mods for *Max Payne*, if not one of the greatest ever made, *Max Payne: Kung Fu Edition* added hand-to-hand combat to the slow-mo gun-shooting action of vanilla *Max Payne*. As if the game wasn't enough like *The Matrix* to begin with, the ability to spin-kick somebody in the face amplified the feeling that you were playing a Hollywood action movie – so much so, that everybody agreed it was far better than the official *Matrix* game, although that's hardly a massive accomplishment.

So well received was the mod, that Remedy included a homage to it in *Max Payne 2*, in a poster hidden in Mona Sax's apartment. Short of being employed by the developers of the game you mod for, that's the nicest endorsement you can get.

RESIDENT EVIL: COLD BLOOD

Steve Hogarty's feeling the chill

www.recoldblood.com | Mod for: Half-Life

THIS MOD'S PRETTY rubbish, I won't lie. Somebody's no doubt very proud of it, and I've played mods ten times as rubbish, but this one's just not that good.

Actually, I'll be fair. The mod is a co-op job, set in one of a handful of maps which are populated with remodelled versions of the original *Half-Life* zombies. These new models are quite well done, as are the sound effects accompanying them (no doubt copyrighted as they're lifted straight from *Resident Evil* itself). The level design isn't half-bad either, focusing on a few objectives which lend purpose to the co-op gameplay.

The struggle comes when you get to the actual combat. Melee attacks are animated just as badly as they were with *Half-Life*'s crowbar, and it's impossible to know if hits are registering. The same goes for guns, the ammunition for which is authentically scarce – blood splatters often don't appear, and there's no sense of impact at all. It's got the health HUD from *Res* though, so all is forgiven.

Best zombie goatee ever.

Play: MOD





INSECTS INFESTATION



"They're in my hair!" screams **Steve Hogarty** www.insectsinfestation.com | Mod for: Half-Life 2

IT'S FORTUNATE FOR the developers of *Insects Infestation* that their mod looks so interesting, otherwise the fact that it's so frustratingly complicated to play would force people to tut loudly before turning the thing off within five minutes of joining a server. In fact, it's easily one of the most pleasant-looking mods for *Half-Life 2* around, appealing to memories of that scene in *Honey I Shrunk The Kids* in which the kids ride that massive polystyrene ant through the jungle of cardboard blades of grass. That's pretty much *Insects Infestation* summed up in a single movie reference right there.

The objective is simple to begin with: each team (either ants or termites) must kill the other team's queen before their own

queen is killed. The queen, as she would do in real life, acts as a stationary spawn point from which you emerge as a larva before growing up into a full-grown builder or soldier. Playing as a builder lets you build various plant structures, such as cacti to defend with, aloe to heal with, and tit-shaped flowers to attack with. In order to build these structures you need resources, and these resources are provided by NPC workers who ferry them from supply areas to the queen.

But wait, it gets harder – builders must create pheromone paths from the NPC spawn points to the supply areas and then to the queen before resource gathering takes place. It's how ants do it in real life, or so the bug house at London Zoo claims.

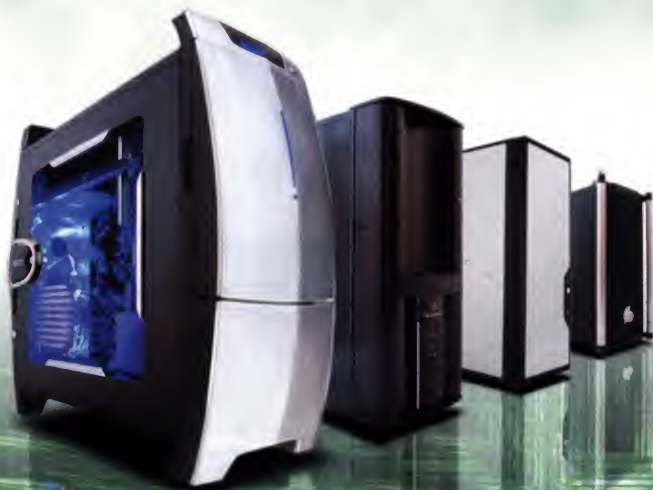
What all of these intricate game mode rules mean is that, if you don't know what you're doing, you simply won't enjoy *Insects Infestation*. You'll find yourself starting a game, only to find your queen has been overrun by the enemy with no hope of survival, due to the blatant positioning of offensive structures preventing you from even gestating past your larval state.

But the fact that the last sentence I typed makes perfect sense in the context of this mod is exactly why I love it. Playing as an insect is brilliant fun, and if you can get the hang of it, the mod becomes a joy to play. You'll need to grab the patches to make it any good, but given time, *Insects Infestation* could be the *Natural Selection* of its generation.



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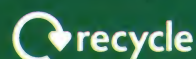
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Fight Club



21st rule of Fight Club: all aboard the Titan...

AS ANOTHER FIGHT CLUB loomed, we decided to bite the bullet and invite you, dear reader, to come online and fight us on the futuristic battlefields of *Battlefield 2142*. And you did come online and you did fight us, and it was indeed futuristic on those battlefields, and fraught with death too.

Will was moved to shouting noises of pure delight after shooting two people in the face as he escaped from

an exploding Titan, diving from the rear deck mere moments before the entire thing erupted. He then went on to team up with Steve in a mech, before going on a killing spree the magnitude of which caused one person to say "I hate mechs," in a defiant manner.

Join us on Thursday, March 8 at 6pm, as we play a bit of *Team Fortress Classic*, available on Steam. Hit www.zonegames.co.uk for up-to-date info.

ZONE CHAT



You spoke, we spoke, then we all slapped our thighs and chortled

AHH ZONE CHAT, the *Stargate SG-1* to Fight Club's *Atlantis*. The *Voyager* to Fight Club's *Enterprise*. As ever, ZONE Chat took place on Fight Club's eve, and in a frenzy of tempestuous chat, we came across the monthly conundrum of trying to come up with a competition for you to possibly win.

With random people shouting "Compo?!" like they were at a *Last Of The Summer Wine* convention (we stole that joke from some clever guy in ZONE Chat), we were beginning to think you don't appreciate how difficult it is to conceive a workable competition. So we turned the tables on you. We asked you to come up with a competition, and that was the competition, and the competition that you came up with would be next month's competition. How post-modern/lazy are we? If Escher did competitions, this is how he'd do them.

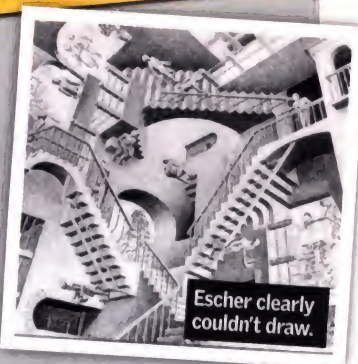
Olliewoods won it, with his competition to come up with fake awards for games (which if you're paying attention you'll realise is now going to be next month's competition) – and so we're heading to his house right now in the PC ZONE blimp to give him an oversized gift-wrapped prize.

Next ZONE Chat's at 5pm on Wednesday, March 7. So come along!

How to join in!



If you fancy joining the ZONE Chat, then you'll need an IRC program and a Net connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install the program, set the options, devise an online identity that'll make you stand out from the crowd, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.



Escher clearly couldn't draw.



Will and Steve take to a mech...



...For all of three minutes.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps due to a crippling case of camera shyness in the face of our rampant screenshotting – then join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some PC ZONE staff might even be there. The latest info can always be found at www.zonegames.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

- 1 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
- 2 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
- 3 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
- 4 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
- 5 WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
- 6 PREY prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
- 7 BATTLEFIELD 2142 bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
- 8 JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING
Listed in NovaWorld

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RetroZONE

Darling, I've made a MESS on the Internet...

MULTI-EMULATION SUPER SYSTEM

EMULATION
OF THE
MONTH

BUT HOW?

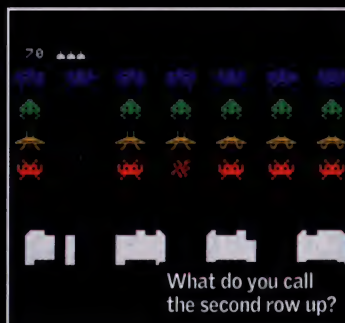
The MESS project isn't quite open-source, but it is free. It's designed to preserve the technology which would otherwise fade into obscurity. It's a noble goal, and has the useful side-effect of letting you play thousands of games, if you can find them. It's a bit more complicated than your average emulator; you'll need MESS, the BIOS for the individual system (some are included) and then the games files for that system. It's a bit more effort, but then again, it's every computer, like, ever...

Links...

- 1 **Mess**
www.mess.org
Home of the emulator. There's a good help file (mess.chm) in the download.
- 2 **Emulator Zone**
www.emulator-zone.com/doc.php/misc/mess.html
And here's the absurd and overwhelming list of things you can emulate...

THE EMOTIONS OF owning a new games machine is one of life's great themes. It's inspired generations of poets, for hundreds of centuries. These heroic bards document several distinct phases. At first, you cherish your new beauty. Every game is to be played to mind-blowing completion, every cranny probed in case a differently-coloured wall yields a refreshing treat. After a while, you acclimatise; the madness of love settles into a stable, caring relationship.

Then comes that awful day, when you compensate for the lack of novelty in your relationship with a rash and cheap act. The day you buy a twin cassette deck to copy *Jetpac* for your friend. The day you chipped your PlayStation. That night you crept onto the Internet,



and leached an 11GB torrent of 3,400 arcade games. The day when playing a game turned into an obstacle, stopping you from playing all the other games you'd got.

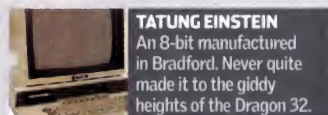
MESS allows you to relive that haunting collapse over and over again – it uses the familiar MAME core, and gives you a hub for you to organise all your old love affairs. With support for over 100 unique machines, you won't even have played most of them, although

you will recognise the over-arching theme of 'rubbish graphics'.

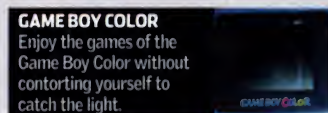
Anyone who's sat their grandmother in front of the Google homepage and said, "Search for anything you like! Go on! Anything!" will have seen first-hand that choice is paralysing. Once, it was the choice of games that hobbled us – now it's a choice of computers, each with their own paralysing variety of games. It's a genuine wonder we even manage to get to the fridge.

SIX OF THE BEST

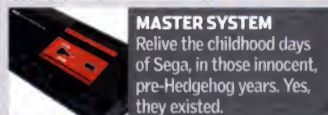
Here's six of the machines you might find yourself playing...



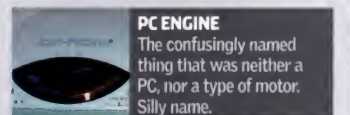
TATUM EINSTEIN
An 8-bit manufactured in Bradford. Never quite made it to the giddy heights of the Dragon 32.



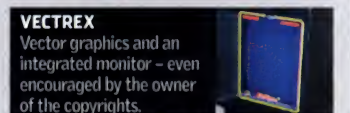
GAME BOY COLOR
Enjoy the games of the Game Boy Color without contorting yourself to catch the light.



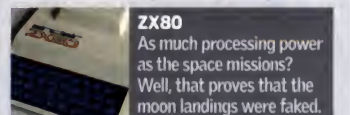
MASTER SYSTEM
Relive the childhood days of Sega, in those innocent, pre-Hedgehog years. Yes, they existed.



PC ENGINE
The confusingly named thing that was neither a PC, nor a type of motor. Silly name.



VECTREX
Vector graphics and an integrated monitor – even encouraged by the owner of the copyrights.

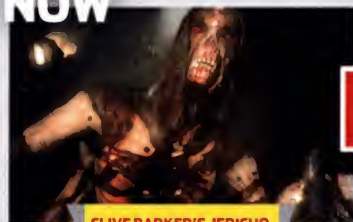


ZX80
As much processing power as the space missions? Well, that proves that the moon landings were faked.

NOW & THEN

Clive Barker's Jericho vs Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie

NOW



CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

CLIVE BARKER WASN'T pleased with the Hollywood movie conversion of his book, *Cabal*. Not because it was a flop – although it was, and that probably didn't help – but because it suffered from a bunch of crappy edits, leaving half-an-hour of Clive's imagination in semi-transparent heaps on the floor.

The book was one of contradictions. It was a story of monsters who weren't really monsters, humans who were inhuman, and a hero called Boone, who was nothing to do with a 1980s TV show starring Michael Elphick.

THEN



NIGHTBREED: THE INTERACTIVE MOVIE

Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie took all the disappointment of the regular movie, and festooned it with cyclical, unrewarding gameplay and a maddening inability to avoid death. It isn't overdramatic to suggest that this 'interactive movie' is the gaming equivalent of Prometheus having his liver ripped out daily by an eagle.

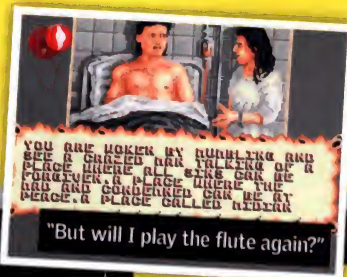
Oh, interactive movies. You were the gaming medium which tried to fit a thousand gallons of ill-conceived ambition and misdirected enthusiasm into a technological shot glass.



PLAY IT!

Nightbreed: The Interactive Movie was released on Amiga, ST and – hooray for everything – DOS.

- 1 Tiptoe up to Google and ask it for words like 'interactive', 'nightbreed', and maybe even 'HOTU', which is an Egyptian spell we just invented.
- 2 After a brief adventure around the Internet, we think you'll probably find a copy of the game. You'll need DOSBox too: dosbox.sourceforge.net.
- 3 Tell the king of Ocean Software that you're researching it for a thesis on underrated games of the '90s.
- 4 Remember why you stopped playing games for a couple of years. Delete game. Wash hands and eyes.



MAME FRAME

Are you sitting comfortably? Dev: Nichibutsu | Year: 1980

ONCE UPON A time, three ships were flying through space. They were the very best of friends, and promised they would never leave each other. But one day, when they were flying through a bit of hostile universe, an evil force separated them.

The littlest ship only had one bullet nozzle, but after he'd blasted through a bunch of fuzzy insects and dandelions, he met up with his friend the middle ship, who was bigger and had two nozzles. Together, they navigated their way through a bunch

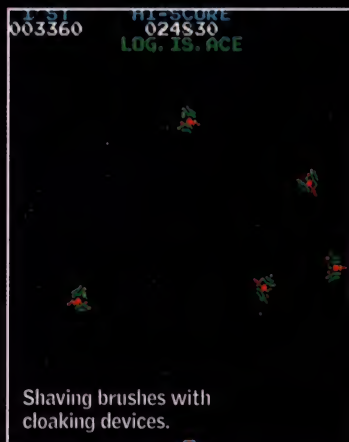
of asteroids that would appear from nowhere and kill them in a way that didn't seem fair.

But then, who should they meet but their friend, the biggest ship? He had another two guns and spoke in a big booming voice that made the littlest ship feel safe, so they docked with him to create a five-turreted super-ship. A ship that was so big, they couldn't avoid the enemy bullets, and died in about three seconds. And that is the story of *Moon Cresta*. Thank you and good night.



WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.



BACK IN THE DAY...



SIMCITY

By Steve Hogarty

I go through phases with *SimCity*. First it interests me, then I play it, then I do really badly at it, then I stop playing it for a few months before it lures me back in with its residential zones. Of course, you can't talk about *SimCity* without mentioning commercial zones – the blue ones. It was these zones which generated money with their 4x4 sprites of shopping centres, but only when placed near the aforementioned residential zones, which were green. Canary yellow was reserved for industrial zones, and why not I say. Although it was complete rubbish when you summoned Godzilla and he appeared in a lake 50 miles from your city, stumbled around in some grass for a bit and then disappeared into a puddle.

SUPERTEST

BEST EXPANSION PACKS



The **PC ZONE** team love to whine: "Please sir, can we have some more?"

YOUR VIEW

Last issue: scary games. Here's what puts a chilly tingle up your bones...

REALMS OF THE HAUNTING

"It was so intense, and the FMV interludes added to the fear. I remember it now – not wanting to switch the light on in a room, knowing some beastie could come out of the floor and I only had one bullet left."

Maritz

THIEF 2

"Do you know, I never found the Cradle level from *Thief 3* scary? I mean, how dare they not make me shit my pants? I was furious!"

Celt

VAMPIRE: BLOODLINES

"Lamps that suddenly exploded, a mysterious figure flitting across corridors, ruined rooms with phantom flames and evidence that something nasty and painfully sad had happened here... I held my breath for long periods..."

Petepointon

ALIEN VS PREDATOR

"The marine radar in *AvP* was genius. Anticipation is usually more scary than the event itself – the radar created that perfectly."

Reverend Joseph

SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE

"I recently picked up a copy for 99p. I find it terrifying that such an abomination could ever be given life."

SunScramble

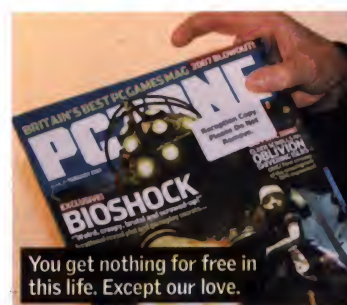
FINISHING A GAME is an awful feeling. It's like all your love and joy are conspiring to kill that which you hold dear, like that simple-minded boy who hugs puppies to death. You could go the Tantric route and simply not play the game to completion, or you could play the game again. Which leaves you at the most hideous metaphorical T-junction. Do you let your gaming nuts explode, or do you tentatively pick up a dead puppy and hug it close to your face?

That's why kindly developers make expansion packs, to rescue us from imaginary disgust. And money – it's fair to say they love the money too. But what have been our favourite expansions?

Would it be *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, the game that successfully lets you play *Half-Life* from the point of view of the invading soldiers? Or would it be *Duke Nukem 3D: Atomic Edition*, the game that Will admirably claims has "a lot of boobies"? Steve and Suzy

agreed on *The Movies: Stunts & Effects*, which allowed the creation of such masterpieces as 'Dog On A Bonnet' and 'Dog Attacks Man A Bit'. Jamie had a thing for *Dark Forces II*, for reasons no more eloquent than "you get to be a bit naughty".

You can listen to our Best Expansion Pack supertest podcast-type-thing on the DVD in MP3 format. Also, don't forget to share your profoundest loves with us at www.pczone.co.uk, where we'll be hiding in the Forums section, in a specially created topic. **PCZ**



STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill heads into *World Of Warcraft* and embarks on his very first trip into *The Burning Crusade*...

EIGHT MILLION. EIGHT. Million. That's how many subscribers Blizzard claim have paid their *WOW* fees in the last month for the dubious pleasure of mincing round a fantasy world with like-minded souls. Until now, I've not been one of them, my last foray into *World of Warcraft* being a NeverQuest-based visit at the time of the original release. And while I vaguely remember cooking a nice meal for some friends, it wasn't quite enough to convince me to join the teeming hordes on a more permanent basis.

Those hordes have swelled in number with the release of this highly-anticipated expansion pack, and indeed over a thousand of them turned out for the obligatory midnight launch at Oxford Street's HMV store – more than showed up for Paul McCartney or Take That. A hand-picked selection of journos were treated to a slap-up meal beforehand, and were filled with booze afterwards, all courtesy of your subscription fees, naturally.



Was I among them? Was I bollocks! I'm the poor prick sat at home installing nine discs followed by a three-hour patch. With my remit relayed during an embarrassing phone call with the editor, he shamefully uttered the immortal line: "Can you be a Blood Elf?"

ELF MAN

A Blood Elf he wants, and a Blood Elf he gets; a demonic Warlock, no less, apparently feared for their 'singular wickedness and cruelty'. Essentially, I'm a bloke in an ornate dressing gown with pointy ears, bad hair and green eyes, sporting what appears to be a pair of desert boots. I'm not sure how they're going to help me 'inflict great torment' upon my foes, but they do look very comfortable.

Once more into the breach we go, and despite the absurd popularity, it's ostensibly business as usual. Admittedly the production values are a notch above the usual goblin-basher, and there's a distinctly Disney-fied feel about the place, with the self-operating brooms surely a direct steal from *Fantasia*. All the same, in time-honoured fashion the first person I speak to asks me if I'd

like to kill some small animals in return for a reward.

Magistrix Erona is she, and Mana Wyrms are they, with the requisite eight dispatched with the minimum of fuss, thanks to a timely intervention from a female elf, name of Bloodin. Why am I writing like this? I'll be ordering a frothing pint of Nutty Slack from the Stout Yeoman of the bar at this rate. These f***ing games have warped my mind. This is no kind of life. It's 2.30am, there's an ancient repeat of *Bullseye* on TV, and I'm attempting to compose a pithy tale about elves.

COMMUNING WITH IMPs

In fairness, Erona does give me a nice pair of Green Chain Boots as payment for my Wurm-slaying. However, I'm tersely informed that I'm not qualified to wear them. Not qualified? How hard is it? Take off old boots, put on new boots, continue as before. It might take a few days to break them in, but we're talking about footwear here, not piloting an aeroplane.

It's a trend that continues: 'You can't wear this, you can't do that, you can't go there.' What kind of place is this? I'm still fuming when I'm suddenly killed by a tree. Reappearing in ethereal spirit form, I am

reminded of another reason for not revisiting *WOW*. Finding my corpse, I hop back in and carry on as usual.

Following some rudimentary training, I get the ability to summon an imp, at which point me and my imp kick the living shit out of the first tree we see. I also acquire a nice new smock that shows off my muscular arms. Nevertheless, when a girl called Wiveka offers me a duel, I pitifully back down, pleading: "You're much stronger than me, it's not fair. Can't we just be friends?" In a final desperate attempt to woo her, I fall back on the despicable line: "I'll make you famous."

FEAR MY WRAITH

To my surprise, Wiveka agrees to join me, and we spend many happy minutes slaughtering wraiths and wretched urchins. She even waits quietly while I consult a Cheese Vendor and buy myself a nice bit of Darnassian Bleu. With the first date seemingly going well, I wander into a nearby inn, hoping to sink some mead and get to know her better. Turning to offer her a seat, I find that she never came in, and has indeed terminated our friendship.

Running back on to the square, she's nowhere to be seen, and a search of the nearby woods proves fruitless. Racked with despair, I mercilessly kill a toad and throw myself into the river. Shocked to my senses, I teleport back to the pub and sit down to a nice fish supper.

Essentially I'm a bloke in an ornate dressing gown with pointy ears, bad hair, green eyes and desert boots...

Wiveka: Hill's faithful companion. Until she saw sense and dumped him.



Elemental, my dear Hill.



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC

Come with *Jon 'Log' Blyth* as he takes you on a journey behind the scenes of Arkane Studios' Source-powered adventure...

IT SEEMS GAMES journalists rarely miss a chance to work a Python reference into their headlines. Hence, with Arkane's action-slasher, there was a nationwide rash of: "He's not the dark messiah, he's a very naughty boy." It was enough to make you want to change jobs and drink yourself stupid. Anyway, *DM's* lead character may have been less memorable than the slinky demon who lived inside him, but the combat was novel and visceral enough to draw considerable attention. Raphaël Colantonio (right), the CEO and creative director of Arkane Studios, spoke to us from Texas, where he's working on Arkane's new game, *The Crossing*...



He wondered when he should tell her about the lantern growing out of her head.

01 UBI DO: "We collaborated heavily with Ubisoft on the story – as you know, *Might & Magic* is a Ubisoft franchise. We met with the producers and had to make a story which came from, and was in accordance with, the entire universe. But this was mainly in Ubisoft's hands; there were a few writers who came to visit us and we integrated the story. It was a collaborative process, though – we pushed the story in different directions with our levels, and sometimes the plot demanded certain things from the levels."

"People would point to possible problems – knowing where to aim and where an enemy was attacking from – and the only way we pulled it off was to work hard and keep believing..."

Raphaël Colantonio, ceo and creative director, Arkane Studios

02 ART DIRECTION: "Art direction was a very different process, and Ubisoft were very demanding in that respect. To begin with, we were going with a very traditional design, but Ubisoft wanted something far more fantasy and unique, so there was a lot of deliberation before we finally found our look. In terms of where we found our inspiration, we first turned to *The Lord Of The Rings* – we love the treatment of that, the materials and lighting in particular. Monsters that aren't too cartoony; our orcs are very human, we didn't want to shy away from that."

"The section with the buildings on the side of the cliff was inspired by something our art director had seen on his travels around the world. So it was fantasy, but it was also real. That's part of the paradox when designing a fantasy universe; you have to design believable things and structures. Everything has to feel possible."



Dark Messiah: Might & Magic was all about the combat.



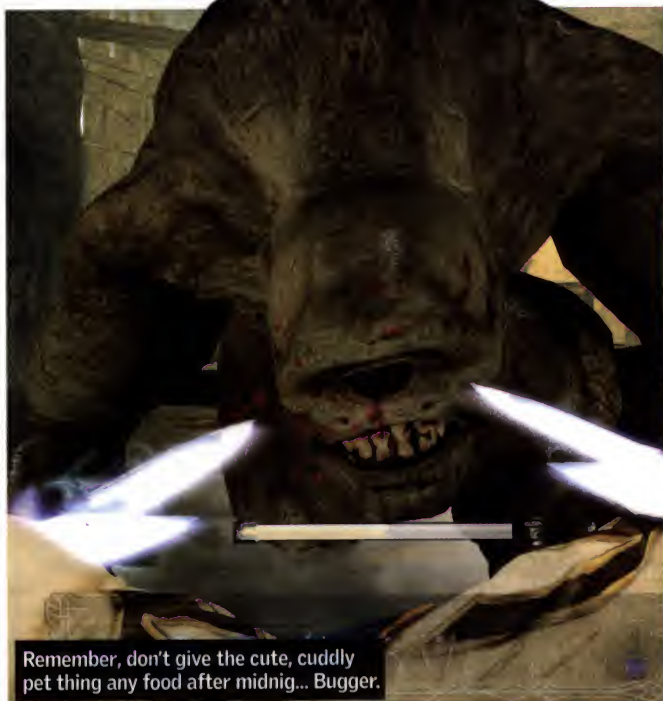
03 FIRST-PERSON SLASHING: "We don't regret using the first-person – for me, it's a huge victory. In making *Dark Messiah*, we put a huge focus on the combat. Maybe too much, perhaps highlighting that to the detriment of other aspects of the game. That's what we decided upon though, and it took a long time – in our case, a year to get a prototype.

"The main thing was that we had to believe it would eventually work. People would point to these possible problems – like knowing where to aim and knowing where an enemy was attacking from. These were important questions, and the only way we pulled it off was to work really hard, keep believing that it was possible when some people were telling us it wasn't, and look honestly at what did and didn't work."

04 CAN'T GET THE STAFF: "At times, we had to fight against the natural reflexes and habits of players. Many people will see it's an FPS, that they're holding a sword and they'll expect it to work like the crowbar out of *Half-Life 2*. But you don't want that – you wouldn't play *Half-Life* with the crowbar and nothing else – at some point, you'd get bored.

"People wanted a very reactive sword, but at the same time it had to be tactile, so you feel the weight of the sword. The staff is much slower, but then some people like it because it's a lot more powerful than the other weapons. It's more challenging, but again, it goes more against the gamer's natural habits. Often, we'd change the rhythm and flow of the fighting, and it just didn't feel right. It was difficult to get right."

Incy Wincy spider...



Remember, don't give the cute, cuddly pet thing any food after midnig... Bugger.

05 STEALTH: "We love the games where you have multiple approaches to the terrain. It was just a matter of time investment, and at some point in the development we realised we shouldn't do a *Thief*-style game. *Thief*'s one of my favourite games, but the fact is, if you take ten people and make them play *Dark Messiah* for the first time, then nine out of ten will play it with a sword or as a magician. It's a special kind of player who's drawn to stealth. Plus, we have this interesting combat system, so it's going to be more rewarding for them to play with that. The stealth in *Dark Messiah* is more for the second-time player, who's finished it with a sword and wants a new challenge."

Broken shutters on a hillside = breezy.

LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY

06 MULTIPLAYER: "The timeline that Ubisoft had for the game was more compatible with taking the multiplayer out to a different team. That's something that Ubisoft were comfortable with, as they often do that with their games. We met with Kuju to discuss the visions we had for the game, we provided them with some of the assets and so on. For the time they had, I think they did a good job."

07 WICKED AS IN BAD: "We weren't guiding people to be good, but there was possibly a problem of balance towards the end of the game. The demonic powers you get from Xana were supposed to be as good as the better equipment you get, should you choose to get rid of her. It's purely down to you – some people really like to feel like the demon and use the new powers, but it's possible we didn't achieve the perfect balance in the choice between those weapons and the demon powers. In the end, it's a matter of personal taste – people will play the game how they want to."



Keith Flint may be a firestarter, but here's the original...



08 COMPARING DARK MESSIAH TO OBLIVION: "I don't know why people kept doing that – it's like bundling together every game that's set in World War II. There's not much we wanted to put in that didn't make it into the game, but there were some spells and weapons that didn't get in because we decided they were too RPG, and we really wanted to get across that this was an action game."



No messiah visible, and it's not what you'd call dark, now is it?



"We wanted to include explosives, but it turned out to be impossible – according to the timeline of the world, such things didn't exist..."

Raphaël Colantonio, ceo and creative director, Arkane Studios

09 GUNPOWDER, NOT: "There wasn't much conflict between our ideas and the *Might & Magic* universe. When we had an idea for a mechanic, Ubisoft were pretty good about being flexible and trying to see how our ideas would fit into the universe. Just one small thing that came up: we wanted to put explosives into the game, some barrels that would explode on contact with fire. It turns out that this was impossible, and we were told that exploding barrels just wouldn't happen. There was a logic to it, though. According to the timeline of the world, that kind of thing didn't exist." **PCZ**

There might not be explosives, but there's certainly fire.



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This month's question:
what's your signature dish?

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of St Jonas, St Eustace and St Bertold. Plane be.



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All details correct at the time of going to press. But they might change. We're fickle like that.

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DEAR



WILLDRE

My ginger shyness is a mute point

Dear Willdre,

I have terrible problems talking to women. I'm a 31-year-old quantum physicist, and I really fancy the daughter of one of my colleagues. She seems to like me too, but whenever we're together I just seem to clam up. It's all well and good playing with her massive robotic dog every so often, but then she'll ask me something and I simply won't know what to say. One time, it got so much that I blurted out "tits". She looked really shocked and then pretended it didn't happen. Sometimes I get so frustrated I jump up and down, flashing my torch on and off. Do you think I

should try and touch her arse when we're alone in a darkened underground car park or elevator shaft? (Also, I can go really fast if I sprint and jump, she's well impressed with this.)

Gordon, address withheld

■ **Willdre says:** Gordon, touching her on the arse would be wholly inappropriate at this stage of your relationship, as would running into her again and again in a way you think is like sex. Why not try walking right up to her and zooming in on her face to imitate kissing her? If she really does like you, she'll reciprocate. If she doesn't, all you've lost is your stupid bizarre mute friendship.

My NPC grunts are killing my marriage

Dear Willdre,

I am French, and as if that wasn't bad enough, it's causing problems in my marriage to a lovely lady from Stourbridge. I taught myself English from my favourite games, and as a result, I can only express my love by screaming "GO, GO, GO!" or "FIRE IN THE HOLE!" It came to a head last night, when she was nibbling my earlobes and I bellowed "YOU HAVE MY EAR, CITIZEN" right into her eyes. When she threatened to leave me, I solemnly intoned that they were waiting for her in the test chamber. Thankfully, this bizarre tendency doesn't apply

to my written English, which I learned from crisp packets. But what should I do? Yours sincerely,

10.5g fat (of which 6g saturates)

■ **Willdre says:** Have you tried playing *Barbie: Sparkle Queen*, or *Pippa Funnell's It's Horse O'Clock*? Then you could simply replace your warfaring grunts with feminine phrases such as, "Is this your tiara? I found it in the Kingdom of Cuddles," or "Hose the crap off your pony, please." We women don't care what men say, as long as it's about ponies and tiaras and cuddles. You'll be back in her good books in no time!

I think i like to alt-enter...

I'm terrified that my father knows about my shameful keyboard shortcuts. I first tried to alt-enter without thinking anything of it, but I quickly realised I liked it. I live and work with my father, so if he walks in on me tapping my backspace at home, he'll control my shifts to stop me pounding my open bracket. I can't escape. There's too much asterisk, but I could do it tilde cows come home. Please help.

Mr Cwyrty Cymru, Wales

■ **Willdre replies:** Why not invest in a wireless keyboard? If you've got one of those slatted wardrobes, you could stand inside it, and peer at your monitor in safety, while hammering away at all your favourite shortcuts. Just don't get overexcited and slash your colon, and so forth.

CALL WILLDRE'S HOTLINES

I can't stop degaussing things

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Help, I just looked into my laser mouse!

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My device could perform faster

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Sexy jpeg burn-in has made

my CRT unsellable

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I'm sure I've read this before

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Willdre's photo casebook

Day 1: Brian's Brainy Bird Bore



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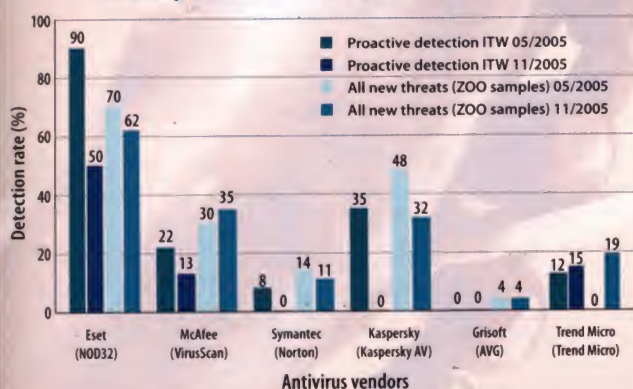


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